# The Paris Review

100

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One Hundredth Issue

John Hersey and John Irving Interviews
Ezra Pound/James Laughlin Feature
Czeslaw Milosz Poem
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September 10, 1984

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**Memorandum from *Newsweek's* Paris Bureau—October 11, 1953**

One midnight in Paris last November a left bank gendarme spotted six figures creeping out of a window into a courtyard on the Rue Garancière. Taking no chances, he shouted "stop" to the startled youths who hurried to explain they were editors of a magazine and had been locked in the building while working late. Had literature touched his curiosity more than crime, he might have learned that the six young men are the editors of the *Paris Review*, the newest publication to appear in the solid tradition of American literary magazines.

***New York Times*, October 10, 1967—Mineola, L.I.**

A trustee of the Farmingdale Public Library who admitted having confiscated a copy of a literary quarterly in the library because he considered an article obscene was found guilty of petit larceny today. A district Council jury of four men and two women took only 28 minutes to convict Carl E. Gorton, 31 years old, of 76 Lockwood Avenue, Farmingdale. He was accused of having taken a copy of the *Paris Review* from the South Farmingdale branch on April 5.

***New York Times*, July 2, 1969—"WELFARE ISLAND RENTED FOR PARTY" "Use of Property for Benefit Called First and Last Time"**

Sections of the city-owned Welfare Island were rented last week for a private party for writers, actors, models and their friends but city officials said the Island was no longer for rent.

The $25.-a-ticket party was the fifth annual benefit for the *Paris Review*, a literary quarterly which paid $50. for rental of a wooded area and adjoining parking lot with a view of the city skyline.

The money was given to the Hospital Commissioner Joseph V. Terenzio, whose Department is responsible for the land which is linked to Manhattan and Queens by the Queensborough Bridge at 59th Street.

City officials said that the Island had never before been rented to a private group for a party. Asked if the Island could be rented again, Tom Morgan, the Mayor's Press secretary replied, "of course not."

The party's 800 guests, many in formal attire, danced to a rock and roll combo out of earshoot of the 2,800 chronically ill patients in the city's Bird S. Coler and Goldwater Memorial Hospitals on the island.

"People wandered around and looked at the ruins," said Mr. Plimpton, referring to abandoned buildings near the hospitals.

**MEMORANDUM FROM *NEWSWEEK*—SEPTEMBER 1986**
**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE *PARIS REVIEW* ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 100th ISSUE. WE APPLAUD THE REVIEW ON ITS UNERRING ABILITY TO ENTERTAIN AND PROVOKE. MAY THERE BE 100 MORE.**

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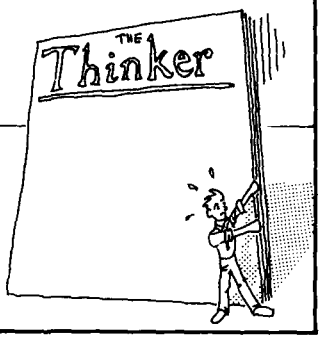


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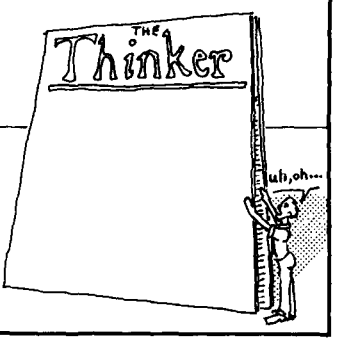


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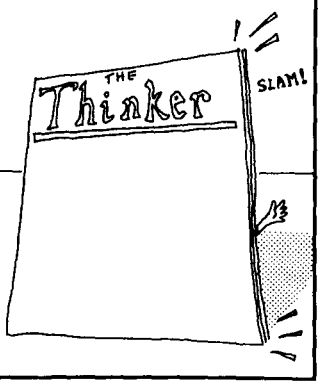


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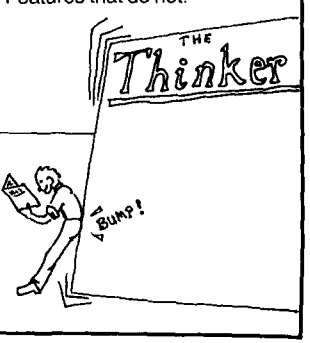


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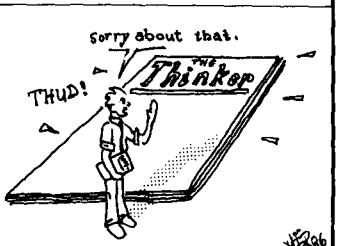


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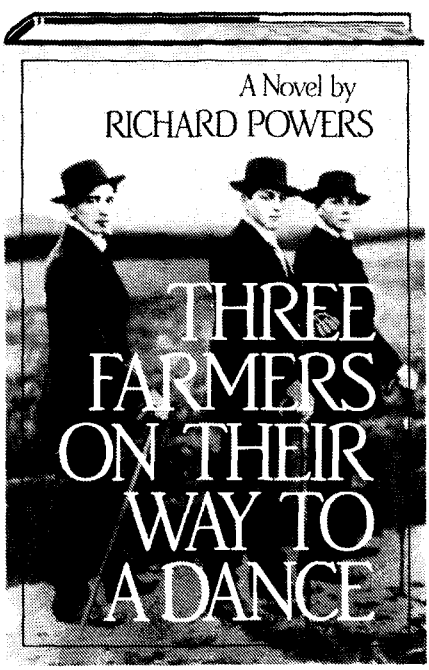


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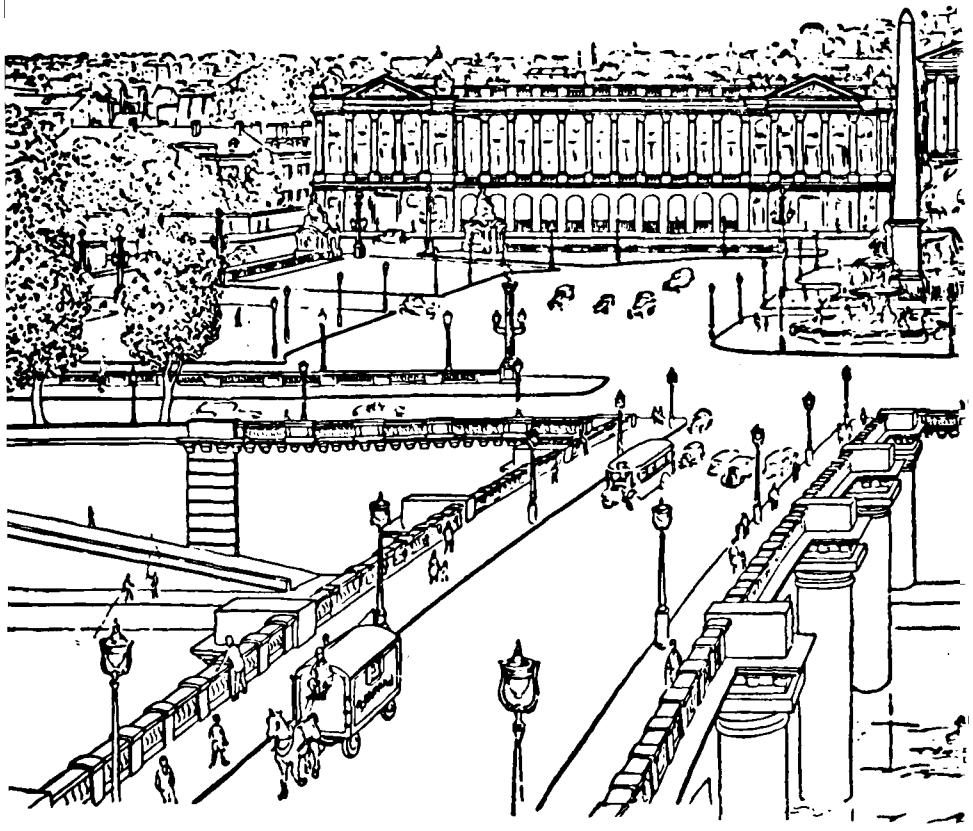

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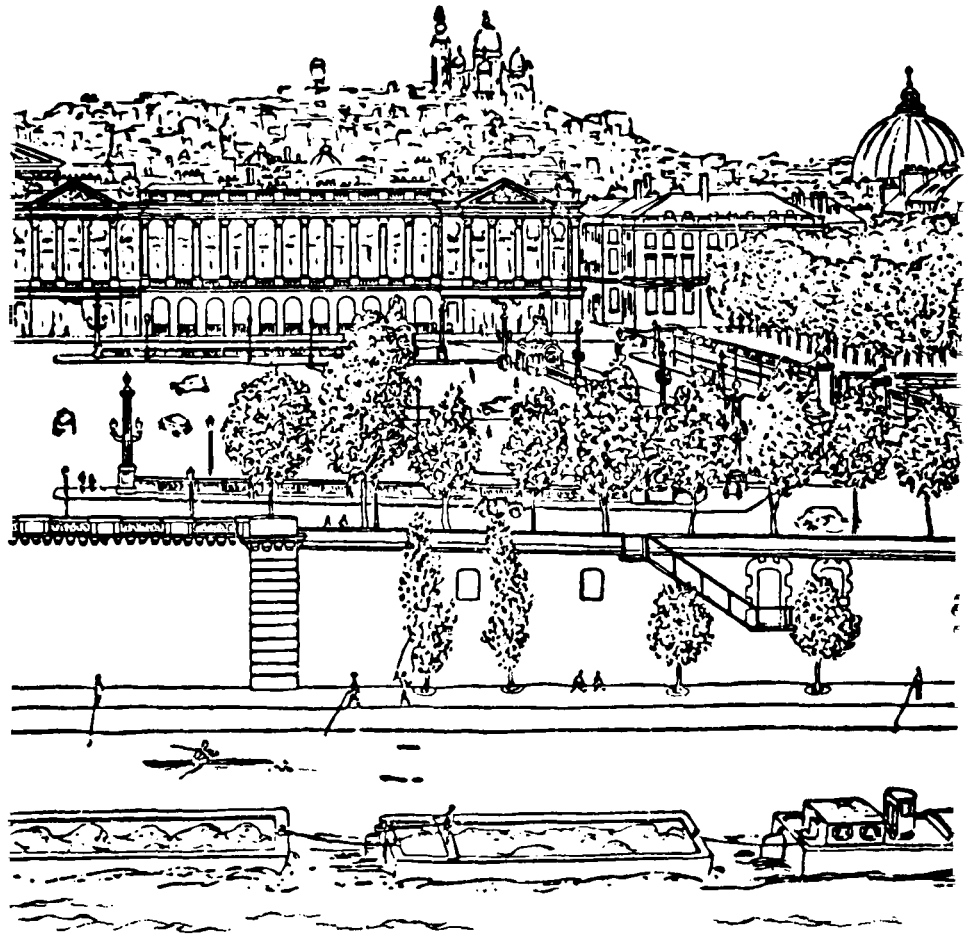

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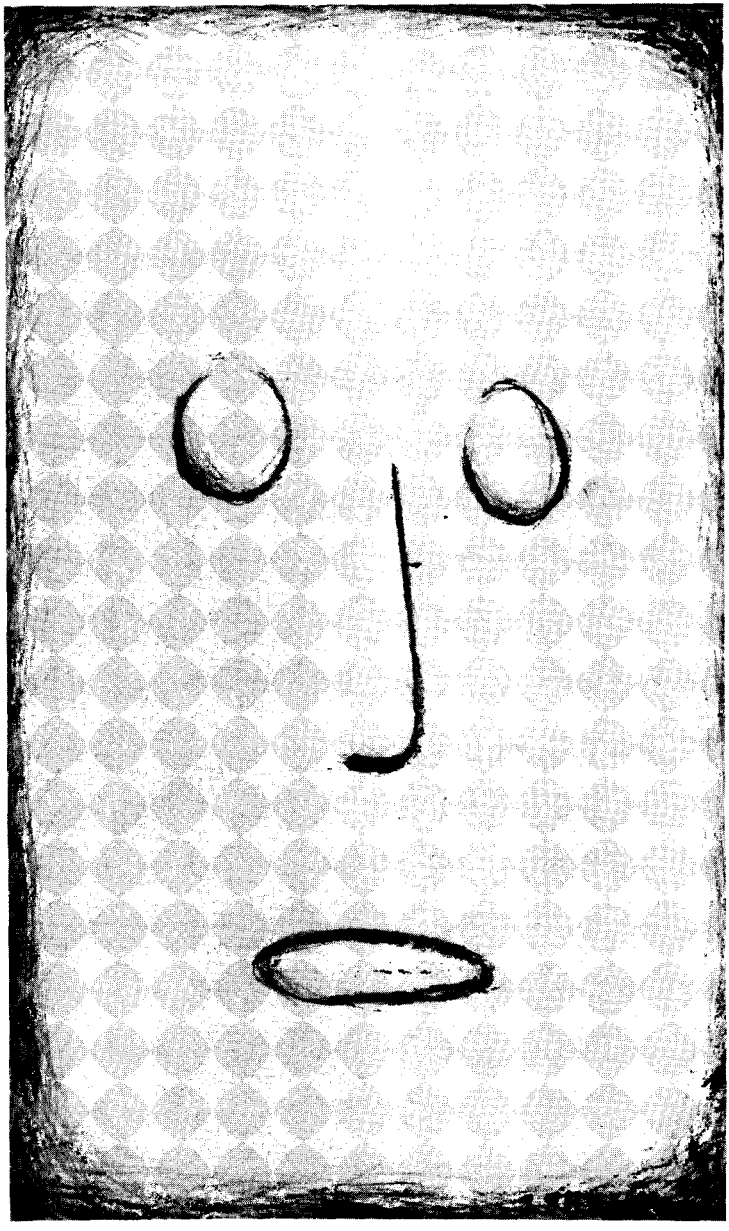

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## *Number 100*


**Interviews**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **John Hersey** | *The Art of Fiction XCII* | 210 |
| **John Irving** | *The Art of Fiction XCIII* | 74 |

**Features**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mary McCarthy** | *"Role-Modeling"* | 339 |
| **Ezra Pound** | *In the Water-Butt* | 303 |
| **James Laughlin** | *Walking Around A Water-Butt* | 309 |
| **Gertrude Stein** | *Letters to a Friend* | 359 |

**Fiction**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Nadine Gordimer** | *Children with the House to Themselves* | 172 |
| **William Maxwell** | *The Lily-White Boys* | 132 |
| **Leonard Michaels** | *Jealousy* | 250 |
| **Alice Munro** | *Circle of Prayer* | 31 |
| **Marilynne Robinson** | *Connie Bronson* | 294 |

**Art**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Llyn Foulkes** | *Portraits* | 285 |
| **Alice Neel** | *Drawings* | 139 |

**Poetry**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **John Ash** | *The Monuments* | 52 |
| **Robert Bringhurst** | *Sunday Morning* | 54 |
| **Harold Brodkey** | *On First Being Published* | 56 |
| **Raymond Carver** | *Two Poems* | 58 |
| **Amy Clampitt** | *Dorothy and William at Rydal Mount* | 61 |
| **Alfred Corn** | *Apartment on 22nd St.* | 64 |
| **Douglas Crase** | *Theme Park* | 65 |
| **James Dickey** | *Spring-Shock* | 66 |
| **Tom Disch** | *MCMLXXXIV* | 68 |
| **Carlos Drummond de Andrade** | *Song for that Man of the People Charlie Chaplin* | 152 |
| **Jonathan Galassi** | *Lateness* | 160 |
| **Jim Gauer** | *Will This Thought Do?* | 161 |


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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Allen Ginsberg** | *Quatrains* | 163 |
| **Jorie Graham** | *Description* | 164 |
| **Linda Gregg** | *Part of Me Wanting Everything to Live* | 167 |
| **Barbara Guest** | *The View from Kandinsky's Window* | 168 |
| **Anthony Hecht** | *Humoresque* | 169 |
| **John Hollander** | *By the Gulf* | 170 |
| **Richard Howard** | *Stanzas in Bloomsbury* | 187 |
| **Lawrence Joseph** | *London* | 189 |
| **James Laughlin** | *A Night at the Opera* | 191 |
| **David Lehman** | *Enigma Variations* | 192 |
| **William Logan** | *The Imitative Fallacy* | 194 |
| **Christopher Logue** | *Walking* | 195 |
| **James Merrill** | *A Room at the Heart of Things* | 196 |
| **Czeslaw Milosz** | *Lauda* | 104 |
| **Howard Nemerov** | *The War in the Air* | 200 |
| **Sharon Olds** | *This Hour* | 201 |
| **Ron Padgett** | *To Woody Woodpecker* | 203 |
| **Molly Peacock** | *A Hot Day in Agrigento* | 204 |
| **Robert Pinsky** | *Lament for the Makers* | 206 |
| **Katha Pollitt** | *The White Room* | 209 |
| **Jim Powell** | *The Beginning of Winter* | 253 |
| **Liam Rector** | *Getting Over Cookie* | 254 |
| **Mark Rudman** | *The Punch* | 258 |
| **Sherod Santos** | *Mothers & Fathers* | 260 |
| **James Schuyler** | *Mood Indigo* | 261 |
| **Frederick Seidel** | *Morphine* | 263 |
| **Hugh Seidman** | *After the Ear Inn After the Snow* | 279 |
| **Karl Shapiro** | *At Auden's Grave* | 281 |
| **Charles Simic** | *A Series of Fortuitous Circumstances* | 284 |
| **Gary Snyder** | *At the White River Roadhouse in the Yukon* | 319 |
| **Elizabeth Spires** | *//* | 320 |
| **Gerald Stern** | *One Animal's Life* | 321 |
| **C. K. Williams** | *Le Petit Salvie* | 323 |
| **Baron Wormser** | *1967* | 333 |
| **Charles Wright** | from *A Journal of the Year of the Ox* | 334 |
| **Franz Wright** | *To the Hawk* | 338 |
| | **Notes on Contributors** | 379 |


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# NOTICE

This issue is the hundredth the editors have managed to publish since the magazine's birth in the spring of 1953. It appears in a year which has seen a cornucopia of celebrations—among others Bloomingdale's (100 years old), the Triboro Bridge (50), Texas (150), the Oreo cookie (75), Harvard University (350), and, of course, the Statue of Liberty (100) with its attendant ruckus on the 4th of July. It can be safely said, however, that publishing one hundred issues of a small literary magazine is a far more startling feat of longevity than can be proclaimed about any of the above. After all, a bridge built across a river, especially the East River, is not likely to succumb. One thinks of it as a permanent structure, ministered to on occasion by engineers; from time to time it gets a new coat of paint. Once built, oblivious, it lets the years roll by until a nice, round number comes up . . . upon which fireworks are set off, not to celebrate the sturdiness of the structure (that is taken for granted) but the appropriateness and nicety of a calendar date.

A literary magazine, on the other hand, is composed of a much more delicate framework—organic rather than material. Its demise can be caused by a number of determinants that have nothing to do with metal fatigue—lack of funds, subscriber revolt, offers of more substantial employment elsewhere, lack of enthusiasm, paucity of interesting material to publish, breakdown or theft of office equipment, and so forth.

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None of this has happened to this magazine to any serious degree. With an occasional fit and start we have reached the mystical one hundred mark.

Thus, a celebration! In the form of the special double-issue at hand.

Two comments are appropriate about this issue—that two of the contributors (Nadine Gordimer and Leonard Michaels) had some of their earliest work published here. That has been an objective from the start—to find and publish the work of emerging writers. Second, readers will note in the contents a mild focus on the origins and workings of creative excellence. This, of course, has been a staple consideration of the magazine—obviously discernible in the on-going series of interviews on the craft of writing. In this issue the contributors to the series are John Irving and John Hersey. The theme is pursued with Mary McCarthy's memoir on her early schooling, with one of Ezra Pound's earliest short stories (to which James Laughlin has supplied an illuminating commentary), and Gertrude Stein's letters of advice and support to a young writer named Wilcox.

Even more was planned for this lagniappe—yet a third interview on the craft of fiction (this one with E. L. Doctorow)—which would have given readers three important American writers from three distinct decades—and also a long letter (from John Train, a former managing editor of the magazine) explaining why Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would not agree to an interview—a document almost as informative as an interview would have been. The addition of this material, however, would have enlarged this celebratory issue to the extent of defying its entry into the average mailbox; its heft would have suggested the arrival of a Sears Roebuck catalogue.

So this material has been postponed. It will appear in the next issue, along with a novella by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, W. S. Merwin. It is sensible to emphasize the contents of 101 . . . if only to suggest further a sense of perseverance, indeed permanence!

—G.A.P.

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# Circle of Prayer

## Alice Munro

Trudy threw a jug across the room. It didn't reach the opposite wall, it didn't hurt anybody, it didn't even break.

This was the jug without a handle, cement-colored, with brown streaks in it, rough as sandpaper to the touch, that Dan made the winter he took pottery classes. He made six little handleless cups, to go with it. The jug and the cups were supposed to be for saki, but the local liquor store doesn't carry saki. Once they brought some home from a trip, but they didn't really like it. So the jug Dan made sits on the highest open shelf in the kitchen, and a few odd items of value are kept in it. Trudy's wedding ring and her engagement ring, the medal Robin won for all-round excellence, in Grade Eight, a long, two-strand necklace of jet beads, that belonged to Dan's mother, and was willed to Robin. Trudy won't let her wear it yet.

Trudy came home from work a little after midnight, she entered the house in the dark. Just the little stove light was on—she and Robin always left that on for each other. Trudy didn't need any other light. She climbed up on a chair without even letting go of her bag, and got down the jug, fished around inside it.

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It was gone. Of course. She had known it would be gone.

She went through the dark house to Robin's room, still with her bag over her arm, the jug in her hand. She turned on the overhead light. Robin groaned, and turned over, pulled the pillow over her head. Shamming.

"Your grandmother's necklace," Trudy said. "Why did you do that? Are you insane?"

Robin shammed a sleepy groan. All the clothes she owned, it seemed, old and new and clean and dirty, were scattered on the floor, on the chair, the desk, the dresser, even on the bed itself. On the wall was a huge poster showing a hippopotamus, with the words underneath "Why Was I Born So Beautiful?" and another poster showing Terry Fox running along a rainy highway, with a whole cavalcade of cars behind him. Dirty glasses, empty yogurt containers, school notes, a Tampax still in its wrapper, the stuffed snake and tiger Robin had had since before she went to school, a collage of pictures of her cat Sausage, who had been run over two years ago. Red and blue ribbons that she had won for jumping, or running, or throwing basketballs.

"You answer me!" said Trudy. "You tell me why you did it!"

She threw the jug. But it was heavier than she'd thought, or else at the very moment of throwing it she lost conviction, because it didn't hit the wall, it fell on the rug beside the dresser, it rolled on the floor, undamaged.

You threw a jug at me that time. You could have killed me.

Not at you. I didn't throw it at you.

You could have killed me.

Proof that Robin was shamming:

She started up in a fright, but it wasn't the blank fright of somebody who'd been asleep. She looked scared, but underneath that childish scared look was another look—stubborn, calculating, disdainful.

"It was so beautiful. And it was valuable. It belonged to your grandmother."

"I thought it belonged to me," said Robin.

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"That girl wasn't even your friend. Christ, you didn't have a good word to say for her, this morning."

"You don't know who is my friend!" Robin's face flushed a bright pink and her eyes filled with tears, but her scornful, stubborn expression didn't change. "I knew her. I talked to her. So get out!"

Trudy works at the Home for Mentally Handicapped Adults. Few people call it that. Older people in town still say, the Misses Weirs' house, and a number of others, including Robin, and presumably most of those her age, called it the Halfwit House.

The house has a ramp now, for wheelchairs, because some of the mentally handicapped may be physically handicapped as well, and it has a swimming pool in the back yard, which caused a certain amount of discussion, when it was installed at taxpayers' expense. Otherwise the house looks pretty much the way it always did—the white wooden walls, the dark-green curlicues on the gables, the steep roof and dark, screened side porch, and the deep lawn in front shaded by soft maple trees.

This month Trudy works the four to midnight shift. Yesterday afternoon she parked her car in front and walked up the drive thinking how nice the house looked, peaceful, as in the days of the Misses Weir, who must have served iced tea and read library books, or played croquet, whatever people did then.

Always some piece of news, some wrangle or excitement, once you get inside.

The men came to fix the pool but they didn't fix it, they went away again. It isn't fixed yet.

"We don't get no use of it, soon summer be over," Josephine said.

"It's not even the middle of June, you're saying summer'll be over," Kelvin said. "You think before you talk. Did you hear about the young girl that was killed, out in the country?" he said to Trudy.

Trudy had started to mix two batches of frozen lemonade, one pink and one plain. When he said that she smashed the spoon down on the frozen chunk so hard that some of the liquid spilled over.

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"How, Kelvin?"

She was afraid she would hear that a girl was dragged off a country road, raped in the woods, strangled, beaten, left there. Robin goes running along the country roads, in her white shorts and t-shirt, a head-band on her flying hair. Robin's hair is golden, her legs and arms are golden. Her cheeks and limbs are downy, not shiny—you wouldn't be surprised to see a cloud of pollen delicately floating and settling behind her, when she runs. Cars hoot at her and she isn't bothered. Foul threats are yelled at her, and she yells foul threats back.

"Driving a truck," Kelvin said.

Trudy's heart eased. Robin didn't know how to drive yet.

"Fourteen years old, she didn't know how to drive," Kelvin said. "She got in the truck and the first thing you know, she ran it into a tree. Where was her parents, that's what I'd like to know? They weren't watching out for her. She got in the truck when she didn't know how to drive and ran it into a tree. Fourteen. That's too young."

Kelvin goes uptown by himself, he hears all the news. He is fifty-two years old, still slim and boyish-looking, well-shaved, with soft, short, clean, dark hair. He goes to the barbershop every day, because he can't quite manage to shave himself. Epilepsy, then surgery, an infected bone-flap, many more operations, a permanent mild difficulty with feet and fingers, a gentle head-fog. The fog doesn't obscure facts, just motives. Perhaps he shouldn't be in the Home at all, but where else? Anyway, he likes it. He says he likes it. He tells the others they shouldn't complain, they should be more grateful, they should behave themselves. He picks up the soft drink cans, or beer bottles, that people have thrown into the front yard—though of course it isn't his job, to do that.

When Janet came in just before midnight, to relieve Trudy, she had the same story to tell.

"I guess you heard about that fifteen-year-old girl?"

When Janet starts telling you something like this, she always starts off with "I guess you heard." *I guess you heard Wilma and Ted are breaking up*, she says. *I guess you heard Alvin Stead had a heart attack.*

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"Kelvin told me," Trudy said. "Only he said she was fourteen."

"Fifteen," Janet said. "She must've been in Robin's class at school. She didn't know how to drive. She didn't even get out of the lane."

"Was she drunk?" said Trudy. Robin won't go near alcohol, or dope, or cigarettes, or even coffee, she's so fanatical about what she puts into her body.

"I don't think so. Stoned, maybe. It was early in the evening. She was home with her sister, their parents were out. Her sister's boyfriend came over, it was his truck, and he either gave her the keys to the truck or she took them. You hear different versions. You hear that they sent her out for something, they wanted to get rid of her, and you hear she just took the keys and went. Anyway she ran it right into a tree, in the lane."

"Jesus," said Trudy.

"I know. It's so idiotic. It's getting so you hate to think about your kids growing up. Did they all take their medication okay? What's Kelvin watching?"

Kelvin was still up, sitting in the living room watching TV.

"It's somebody being interviewed. He wrote a book about schizophrenics."

Anything he comes across about mental problems, Kelvin has to watch, or try to read.

"I think it depresses him, the more he watches that kind of thing. Do you know I found out today I have to make five hundred roses out of pink Kleenex, for my niece Laurel's wedding? For the car. She said, you promised you'd make the roses for the car. Well I didn't. I don't remember promising a thing. Are you going to come over and help me?"

"Sure," said Trudy.

"I guess the real reason I want him to get off the schizophrenics is, I want to watch the old *Dallas*," Janet said. She and Trudy disagree about this. Trudy can't stand to watch those old reruns of *Dallas*, to see the characters with their younger, plumper, faces, going through tribulations and bound up in romantic complications they and the audience have now forgotten all about. That's what's so hilarious, Janet says, it's so unbelievable it's wonderful. All that happens and they just forget about

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it and go on. But to Trudy it doesn't seem so unbelievable, that the characters would go from one thing to the next thing—forgetful, hopeful, photogenic, forever changing their clothes. That it's not so unbelievable, is what she really can't stand.

Robin, the next morning, said, "Oh, probably. All those people she hung around with drink. They party all the time. They're self-destructive. It's her own fault. Even if her sister told her to go she didn't have to go. She didn't have to be so stupid."

"What was her name?" Trudy said.

"Tracy Lee," said Robin with distaste. She stepped on the pedal of the garbage-tin, lifted rather than lowered the container of yogurt she had just emptied, and dropped it in. She was wearing bikini underpants and a t-shirt that said, "If I Want to Listen to an Asshole, I'll Fart."

"That shirt still bothers me," Trudy said. "Some things are disgusting but funny, and some things are more disgusting than funny."

"What's the problem?" said Robin. "I sleep alone."

Trudy sat outside, in her wrapper, drinking coffee, while the day got hot. There is a little brick-paved space by the side door, that she and Dan always called the patio. She sat there. This is a solar-heated house, with big panels of glass in the south-sloping roof, the oddest-looking house in town. It's odd inside, too, with the open shelves in the kitchen, instead of cupboards, and the living room up some stairs, looking out over the fields at the back. She and Dan, for a joke, gave parts of it the most conventional, suburban-sounding names—the patio, the powder room, the master bedroom. Dan always had to joke about the way he was living. He built the house himself—Trudy did a lot of the painting, and staining—and it was a success. Rain didn't leak in around the panels, and part of the house's heat really did come from the sun. Most people who have the ideas, or ideals, that Dan has, aren't very practical. They can't fix things, or make things, they don't understand wiring, or carpentry, or whatever it is they need to understand. Dan is good at everything—at gardening, cutting wood, building a house. He is especially good at repairing motors. He used to

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travel around, getting jobs as an auto mechanic, a small engines repairman. That's how he ended up here. He came here to visit Marlene, got a job as a mechanic, became a working partner in an auto repair business, and before he knew it—married to Trudy, not Marlene—he was a small-town businessman, a member of the Kinsmen. All without shaving off his sixties beard or trimming his hair any more than he wanted to. The town was too small, Dan was too smart, for that to be necessary.

Now Dan lives in a townhouse in Richmond Hill, with a girl named Genevieve. She is studying law. She was married when she was very young, and had three little children. Dan met her three years ago, when her camper broke down a few miles outside of town. He told Trudy about her, that night. The rented camper, the three little children, hardly more than babies, the lively little divorced mother with her hair in pigtails. Her bravery, her poverty, her plans to enter law school. If the camper hadn't been easily fixed, he was going to invite her and her children to spend the night. She was on her way to her parents' summer place at Pointe du Baril.

"Then she can't be all that poor," Trudy said.

"You can be poor and have rich parents," Dan said.

"No you can't."

Last summer, Robin went to Richmond Hill for a month's visit. She came home early. She said it was a madhouse. The oldest child has to go to a special reading clinic, the middle one wets the bed. Genevieve spends all her time in the Law Library, studying. No wonder. Dan shops for bargains, cooks, looks after the children, grows vegetables, drives a taxi on Saturdays and Sundays. He wants to set up a motorcycle repair business in the garage, but he can't get a permit, the neighbors are against it.

He told Robin he was happy, Never happier, he said. Robin came home firmly grown-up—severe, sarcastic, determined. She had some slight, steady, grudge she hadn't had before. Trudy couldn't worm it out of her, couldn't tease it out of her—the time when she could do that was over.

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Robin came home at noon and changed her clothes. She put on a light, flowered cotton blouse and ironed a pale blue cotton skirt.

She said that some of the girls from the class might be going around to the Funeral Home, after school.

"I forgot you had that skirt," said Trudy.

If she thought that was going to start a conversation, she was mistaken.

The first time Trudy met Dan, she was drunk. She was nineteen years old, tall and skinny—as she still is—with a wild head of curly black hair (it is cropped short now and showing the grey as black hair does). She was very tanned, wearing jeans and a tie-dyed t-shirt. No brassiere and no need. This was in Muskoka, in August, in a hotel bar where they had a band. She was camping, with girlfriends. He was there with his fiancée, Marlene. He had taken Marlene home to meet his mother, who lived in Muskoka, on an island, in an empty hotel. When Trudy was nineteen, he was twenty-eight. She danced around by herself, giddy and drunk, in front of the table where he sat with Marlene, a meek-looking blonde with a big pink shelf of bosom all embroidered in little fake pearls. Trudy just danced in front of him until he got up and joined her. At the end of the dance he asked her name, and took her back and introduced her to Marlene.

"This is Judy," he said. Trudy collapsed, laughing, into the chair beside Marlene's. Dan took Marlene up to dance. Trudy finished off Marlene's beer and went looking for her friends.

"How do you do?" she said to them. "I'm Judy!"

He caught up with her at the door of the bar. He had ditched Marlene when he saw Trudy leaving. A man who could change course quickly, see the possibilities, flare up with new enthusiasm. He told people later that he was in love with Trudy before he even knew her real name. But he told Trudy that he cried, when he and Marlene were parting.

"I have feelings," he said. "I'm not ashamed to show them."

Trudy had no feelings for Marlene at all. Marlene was over thirty, what could she expect? Marlene still lives in town, works

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at the Hydro office, is not married. When Trudy and Dan were having one of their conversations about Genevieve, Trudy said, "Marlene must be thinking I got what's coming to me."

Dan said he had heard that Marlene had joined the Fellowship of Bible Christians. The women weren't allowed make-up and had to wear a kind of bonnet to church on Sundays.

"She won't be able to have a thought in her head, but forgiving."

Trudy said, "I bet."

This is what happened at the Funeral Home, as Trudy got the story from both Kelvin and Janet:

The girls from Tracy Lee's class all showed up together, after school. This was during what was called the visitation, when the family waited beside Tracy Lee's open casket, to receive friends. Her parents were there, her married brother and his wife, her sister, and even her sister's boyfriend, who owned the truck. They stood in a row and people lined up to say a few words to them. A lot of people came. They always do, in a case like this. Tracy Lee's grandmother was at the end of the row, in a brocade-covered chair. She wasn't able to stand up for very long.

All the chairs at the Funeral Home are upholstered in this white and gold brocade. The curtains are the same, the wallpaper almost matches. There are little wall-bracket lights behind heavy pink glass. Trudy has been there, several times, she knows what it's like. But Robin, and most of these girls, had never been inside the place before. They didn't know what to expect. Some of them began to cry as soon as they got inside the door.

The curtains were closed. Soft music was playing, not exactly church music but it sounded like it. Tracy Lee's coffin was white, with a gold trim, matching all the brocade and the wallpaper. It had a lining of pleated pink satin. A pink satin pillow. Tracy Lee had not a mark on her face. She was not made up quite as usual, because the undertaker had done it. But she was wearing her favorite earrings, turquoise-colored triangles and yellow crescents, two to each ear. (Some people thought

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that was in bad taste.) On the part of the coffin that covered her from the waist down there was a big heart-shaped pillow of pink roses.

The girls lined up to speak to the family. They shook hands, they said sorry-for-your-loss, just the way everybody else did. When they got through that, when all of them had let the grandmother squash their cool hands between her warm, swollen, freckled ones, they lined up again, in a straggling sort of way, and began to go past the coffin. Many were crying now, shivering. What could you expect? Young girls.

But they began to sing as they went past. With difficulty at first, shyly, but with growing confidence in their sad, sweet, voices, they sang.

"Now, while the blossom still clings to the vine,
I'll taste your strawberries, I'll drink your sweet wine—"

They had planned the whole thing, of course, beforehand, they had got that song off a record. They believed that it was an old hymn.

So they filed past, singing, looking down at Tracy Lee, and it was noticed that they were dropping things into the coffin. They were slipping the rings off their fingers and the bracelets from their arms, and taking the earrings out of their ears. They were undoing necklaces, and bowing to pull chains and long strands of beads over their heads. Everybody gave something. All this jewelry went flashing and sparkling down on the dead girl, to lie beside her, in her coffin. One girl pulled the bright combs out of her hair, let those go.

And nobody made a move to stop this. How could anyone interrupt? It was like a religious ceremony. The girls behaved as if they'd been told what to do, as if this was what was always done on such occasions. They sang, they wept, they dropped their jewelry. The sense of ritual made every one of them graceful.

The family wouldn't stop it. They thought it was beautiful.

"It was like church," Tracy Lee's mother said, and her grandmother said, "All those lovely young girls loved Tracy Lee. If

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they wanted to give their jewelry to show how they loved her, that's their business. It's not anybody else's business. I thought it was beautiful."

Tracy Lee's sister broke down and cried. It was the first time she had done so.

Dan said, "This is a test of love."

Of Trudy's love, he meant. Trudy started singing.

"Please release me, let me go—"

She clapped a hand to her chest, danced in swoops around the room, singing. Dan was near laughing, near crying. He couldn't help it, he came and hugged her and they danced together, staggering. They were fairly drunk. All that June (it was two years ago) they were drinking gin, in between and during their scenes. They were drinking, weeping, arguing, explaining, and Trudy had to keep running to the liquor store. Yet she can't remember ever feeling really drunk or having a hangover. Except that she felt so tired all the time, as if she had logs chained to her ankles.

She kept joking. She called Genevieve, "Jenny the Feeb."

"This is just like wanting to give up the business and become a potter," she said. "Maybe you should have done that. I wasn't really against it. You gave up on it. And when you wanted to go to Peru. We could still do that."

"All those things were just straws in the wind," Dan said.

"I should have known when you started watching 'The Ombudsman' on TV," Trudy said. "It was the legal angle, wasn't it? You were never so interested in that kind of thing before."

"This will open life up for you too," Dan said. "You can be more than just my wife."

"Sure. I think I'll be a brain surgeon."

"You're very smart. You're a wonderful woman. You're brave."

"Sure you're not talking about Jenny the Feeb?"

"No, you. You, Trudy. I still love you. You can't understand that I still love you."

Not for years had he had so much to say about how he loved her. He loved her skinny bones, her curly hair, her roughening skin, her way of coming into a room with a stride that shook

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the windows, her jokes, her clowning, her tough talk. He loved her mind and her soul. He always would. But the part of his life that had been bound up with hers was over.

"That is just talk, that is talking like an idiot!" Trudy said. "Robin, go back to bed!" For Robin in her skimpy nightgown was standing at the top of the steps.

"I can hear you yelling and screaming," Robin said.

"We weren't yelling and screaming," Trudy said. "We're trying to talk about something private."

"What?"

"I told you, it's something private."

When Robin sulked off to bed, Dan said, "I think we should tell her. It's better for kids to know. Genevieve doesn't have any secrets from her kids. Josie's only five, and she came into the bedroom one afternoon—"

Then Trudy did start yelling and screaming. She clawed through a cushion cover. "You stop telling me about your sweet fucking Genevieve and her sweet fucking bedroom and her asshole kids, you shut up, don't tell me any more! You're just a big dribbling mouth without any brains, I don't care what you do, just shut up!"

Dan left. He packed a suitcase, he went off to Richmond Hill. He was back in five days. Just outside of town he had stopped the car, to pick Trudy a bouquet of wild flowers.

He told her he was back for good, it was over.

"You don't say?" said Trudy.

But she put the flowers in water. Dusty pink milkweed flowers that smelled like face-powder, black-eyed Susans, wild sweet-peas, and orange lilies that must have got loose from old disappeared gardens.

"So, you couldn't stand the pace?" she said.

"I knew you wouldn't fall all over me," Dan said. "You wouldn't be you if you did. And what I came back to is you."

She went to the liquor store, and this time bought champagne. For a month—it was still summer—they were back together being happy. She never really found out what had happened at Genevieve's house. Dan said he'd been having a

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middle-aged fit, that was all, he'd come to his senses. His life was here, with her and Robin.

"You're talking like a marriage-advice column," Trudy said.

"Okay. Forget the whole thing."

"We better," she said. She could imagine the kids, the confusion, the friends, old boyfriends maybe, that he hadn't been prepared for. Jokes and opinions that he couldn't understand. That was possible. The music he liked, the way he talked, even his hair and his beard might be out of style.

They went on family drives, picnics. They lay out in the grass behind the house, at night, looking at the stars. The stars were a new interest of Dan's, he got a map. They hugged and kissed each other frequently and tried out some new things—or things they hadn't done for a long time—when they made love.

At this time the road in front of the house was being paved. They'd built their house on a hillside at the edge of town, past the other houses, but trucks were using this street quite a bit now, avoiding the main streets, so the town was paving it. Trudy got so used to the noise and constant vibration she said she could feel herself jiggling all night, even when everything was quiet. Work started at seven in the morning. They woke up at the bottom of a river of noise. Dan dragged himself out of bed then, losing the hour of sleep that he loved best. There was a smell of diesel fuel in the air.

She woke up one night to find him not in bed. She listened to hear noises in the kitchen or the bathroom, but she couldn't. She got up and walked through the house. There were no lights on. She found him sitting outside, just outside the door, not having a drink or a glass of milk or a coffee, sitting with his back to the street.

Trudy looked out at the torn-up earth and the huge stalled machinery.

"Isn't the quiet lovely?" she said.

He didn't say anything.

Oh. Oh.

She realized what she'd been thinking, when she found his side of the bed empty, and couldn't hear him anywhere in the house. Not that he'd left her, but that he'd done worse. Done

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away with himself. With all their happiness and hugging and kissing and stars and picnics, she could think that.

"You can't forget her," she said. "You love her."

"I don't know what to do."

She was glad just to hear him speak. She said, "You'll have to go and try again."

"There's no guarantee I can stay," he said. "I can't ask you to stand by."

"No," said Trudy. "If you go, that's it."

"If I go that's it."

He seemed paralyzed. She felt that he might just sit there, repeating what she said, never be able to move or speak for himself again.

"If you feel like this, that's all there is to it," she said. "You don't have to choose. You're already gone."

That worked. He stood up stiffly, he came over and put his arms around her. He stroked her back.

"Come back to bed," he said. "We can rest for a little while yet."

"No. You've got to be gone when Robin wakes up. If we go back to bed it'll just start all over again."

She made him a thermos of coffee. He packed the bag he had taken with him before. All Trudy's movements seemed skillful and perfect, as they never were, usually. She felt serene. She felt as if they were an old couple, moving in harmony, in wordless love, past injury, past forgiving. Their good-bye was hardly a ripple. She went outside with him. It was between four-thirty and five o'clock, the sky was beginning to lighten and the birds to wake, everything was drenched in dew. There stood the big harmless machinery, stranded in the ruts of the road.

"Good thing it isn't last night, you couldn't have got out," she said. She meant that the road hadn't been navigable. It was just yesterday that they had graded a narrow track, for local traffic.

"Good thing," he said.

Good-bye.

"All I want is to know why you did it. Did you just do it for show? Like your father, for show. It's not the necklace so

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much. But it was a beautiful thing, I love jet beads, it was the only thing we had of your grandmother's. It was your right but you have no right to take me by surprise like that, I deserve an explanation, I always loved jet beads. Why?"

"I blame the family," Janet says. "It was up to them to stop it. Some of the stuff was just plastic, those junk earrings and bracelets, but what Robin threw in, that was a crime. And she wasn't the only one. There were birthstone rings and gold chains. Somebody said a diamond cluster ring, but I don't know if I believe that. They said the girl inherited it, like Robin. You didn't ever have it evaluated, did you?"

"I don't know if jet is worth anything," Trudy says.

They are sitting in Janet's front room, making roses out of pink Kleenex.

"It's just stupid," Trudy says.

"Well. There is one thing you could do," says Janet. "I don't hardly know how to mention it."

"What?"

"Pray."

Trudy had the feeling, from Janet's tone, that Janet was going to tell her something serious and unpleasant, something about herself—Trudy—which was affecting her life, and which everybody knew except her. Now she wants to laugh, after bracing herself. She doesn't know what to say.

"You don't pray, do you?" Janet says.

"I haven't got anything against it," Trudy says. "I wasn't brought up to be religious."

"It's not strictly speaking religious," Janet says. "I mean, it's not connected with any church. This is just some of us that pray. I can't tell you the names of anybody in it but most of them you know. It's supposed to be secret. It's called the Circle of Prayer."

"Like at high school," Trudy says. "At high school there were secret societies, you weren't supposed to tell who was in them. Only I wasn't."

"I was in everything going." Janet sighs. "This is actually more on the serious side. Though some people in it don't take it seri-

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ously enough, I don't think. Some people, they'll pray that they'll find a parking spot, or they'll pray they get good weather for their holidays. That isn't what it's for. But that's just individual praying, what the Circle is really about is, you phone up somebody that is in it, and tell them what it is you're worried about, or upset about, and ask them to pray for you. And they do. And they phone one other person, that's in the Circle, and they phone another and it goes all around, and we pray for one person, all together."

Trudy throws a rose away. "That's botched. Is it all women?"

"There isn't any rule it has to be. But it is, yes. Men would be too embarrassed. I was embarrassed at first. Only the first person you phone knows your name, who it is that's being prayed for, but in a town like this nearly everybody can guess. But if we started gossiping and ratting on each other it wouldn't work, and everybody knows that. So we don't. And it does work."

"Like, how?" Trudy says.

"Well, one girl banged up her car, she did eight hundred dollars damage, and it was kind of a tricky situation, where she wasn't sure her insurance would cover it, and neither was her husband, he was raging mad, but we all prayed, and the insurance came through without a hitch. That's only one example."

"There wouldn't be much point in praying to get the necklace back, when it's in the coffin and the funeral's this morning," says Trudy mildly.

"It's not up to you to say that. You don't say what's possible or impossible. You just ask for what you want. Because it says in the Bible, ask and it shall be given. How can you be helped if you won't ask? You can't, that's for sure. What about when Dan left, what if you'd prayed then? I wasn't in the Circle then, or I could have said something to you. Even if I knew you'd resist it, I would have said something. A lot of people resist. Now even, it doesn't sound too great with that girl, how do you know, maybe even now it might work. It might not be too late."

"All right," says Trudy in a calm, slow voice. "All right." She pushes all the floppy flowers off her lap. "I'll just get down on

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my knees right now and pray that I get Dan back. I'll pray that I get the necklace back and I get Dan back and why do I have to stop there? I can pray that Tracy Lee never died. I can pray that she comes back to life. Why didn't her mother ever think of that?"

Good news. The swimming pool is fixed. They'll be able to fill it tomorrow. But Kelvin is depressed. Early this afternoon—partly to keep them from bothering the men who were working on the pool—he took Marie and Josephine uptown. He let them get ice cream cones. He told them to pay attention and eat the ice cream up quickly, because the sun was hot, and it would melt. They ignored him. They licked at their cones now and then, as if they had all day. Ice cream was soon dribbling down their chins and down their arms. Kelvin had grabbed a handful of paper napkins but he couldn't wipe it up fast enough. They were a mess. A spectacle. They didn't care. Kelvin told them they weren't so pretty that they could afford to look like that.

"Some people don't like the look of us anyway," he said. "Some people don't even think we should be allowed uptown. People just get used to seeing us and not staring at us like freaks and you make a mess and spoil it."

They laughed at him. He could have cowed Marie if he had her alone, but not when she was with Josephine. Josephine was one who needed some old-fashioned discipline, in Kelvin's opinion. Kelvin had been in places where people didn't get away with anything like they got away with, here. He didn't agree with hitting. He had seen plenty of it done, but he didn't agree with it, even on the hand. But a person like Josephine could be shut up in her room, she could be made to sit in a corner, she could be put on bread and water, and it would do a lot of good. All Marie needed was a talking-to, she had a weak personality. But Josephine was a devil.

"I'll talk to both of them," Trudy says. "I'll tell them to say they're sorry."

"I want for them to *be* sorry," Kelvin says. "I don't care if they say they are. I'm not taking them ever again."

Later, when all the others are in bed, Trudy gets him to sit

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down to play cards with her, on the screened verandah. They play Crazy Eights. Kelvin says that's all he can manage tonight, his head is sore.

Uptown, a man said to him, "Hey, which one of them two is your girlfriend?"

"Stupid," Trudy says. "He was a stupid jerk."

The man talking to the first man said, "Which one you going to marry?"

"They don't know you, Kelvin. They're just stupid."

But they did know him. One was Reg Hooper, one was Bud DeLisle. Bud DeLisle that sold real estate. They knew him, they had talked to him in the barbershop, they called him Kelvin. Hey, Kelvin, which one you going to marry?

"Nerds," says Trudy. "That's what Robin would say."

"You think they're your friend but they're not," says Kelvin, "how many times I see that happen."

Trudy goes to the kitchen to put on coffee. She wants to have fresh coffee to offer Janet, when Janet comes in. She apologized, this morning, and Janet said all right, I know you're upset. It really is all right. Sometimes, you think they're your friend, and they are.

She looks at all the mugs hanging on their hooks. She and Janet shopped all over to find them. A mug with each one's name. Marie, Josephine, Arthur, Kelvin, Shirley, George, Dorinda. You'd think Dorinda would be the hardest name to find, but actually, the hardest was Shirley. Even the people who can't read have learned to recognize their own mugs, by color and pattern.

One day two new mugs appeared, bought by Kelvin. They said Trudy, and Janet.

"I'm not going to be too overjoyed seeing my name in that line-up," Janet said. "But I wouldn't hurt his feelings for a million dollars."

For a honeymoon, Dan took her to an island on the lake, where the hotel was. The hotel was closed down, but his mother still lived there. Dan's father was dead. His mother lived there alone. She took the boat with the outboard motor across the

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water, to get her groceries. She sometimes made a mistake, and called Trudy, Marlene.

The hotel wasn't much. It was a white wooden box in a clearing by the shore. Some little boxes of cabins stuck behind it. Dan and Trudy stayed in one of the cabins. Every cabin had a wood stove. Dan built a fire at night to take off the chill. But the blankets were damp and heavy, when he and Trudy woke up in the morning.

Dan caught fish, and cooked them. He and Trudy climbed the big rock behind the cabins, and picked blueberries. He asked her if she knew how to make a pie crust, and she didn't. So he showed her, rolling out the dough with a whisky bottle.

In the morning there was a mist over the lake, just as you see in the movies, or in a painting.

One afternoon Dan stayed out longer than usual, fishing. Trudy kept busy for a while in the kitchen, rubbing the dust off things, washing some jars. It was the oldest, darkest kitchen she had ever seen, with wooden racks for the dinner plates to dry in. She went outside, and climbed the rock by herself, thinking she would pick some blueberries. But it was already dark under the trees, the evergreens made it dark, and she didn't like the idea of wild animals. She sat on the rock looking down on the roof of the hotel, the old dead leaves and broken shingles. She heard a piano being played. She scrambled down the rock and followed the music, around to the front of the building. She walked along the front verandah and stopped at a window, looking into the room that used to be the lounge. The room with the blackened stone fireplace, the lumpy leather chairs, the horrible mounted fish.

Dan's mother was there, playing the piano. A tall, straight-backed old woman, with her grey-black hair twisted into such a tiny knot. She sat and played the piano, without any lights on, in the half-dark, half-bare room.

Dan had said that his mother came from a rich family. She had taken piano lessons, dancing lessons, she had gone around the world, when she was a young girl. There was a picture of her, on a camel. But she wasn't playing a classical piece, the sort of thing you'd expect her to have learned. She was playing,

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"It's Three O'Clock in the Morning." When she got to the end she started in again. Maybe it was a special favorite of hers, something she had danced to, in the old days. Or maybe she wasn't satisfied yet, that she had got it right.

Why does Trudy now remember this moment? She sees her young self looking in the window at the old woman playing the piano. The dim room, with its oversize beams and fireplaces and the lonely leather chairs. The clattering, faltering, persistent, piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which ached, then, from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own happiness, in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened, the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you got outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life—what do they have to do with it? They aren't exactly promises. Breathing spaces. Is that all?

She goes into the front hall and listens for any noise from upstairs.

All quiet there, all medicated.

The phone rings, right beside her head.

"Are you still there?" Robin says.

"I'm still here."

"Can I run over and ride home with you? I didn't go for my run earlier because it was too hot."

You threw the jug. You could have killed me.

Yes.

Kelvin, waiting at the card-table, under the light, looks bleached and old. There's a pool of light whitening his brown hair. His face sags, waiting. He looks old, sunk into himself, wrapped in a thick bewilderment, nearly lost to her. Nearly lost.

"Kelvin, do you pray?" says Trudy. Her voice sounds harsh, even panicky, though she didn't mean it to. Also, she didn't

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know she was going to ask him that. "I mean, it's none of my business. But like, for anything specific?"

He's got an answer for her, which is rather surprising. He pulls his face up, as if he might have felt the tug he needed, to bring him to the surface.

"If I was smart enough to know what to pray for," he says, "then I wouldn't have to."

He smiles at her, with some oblique notion of conspiracy, offering his halfway joke. It's not meant as comfort, particularly. Yet it radiates—what he said, the way he said it, just the fact that he's there again, radiates, expands the way some silliness can, when you're very tired. In this way, when she was young, and high, a person or a moment could become a lily floating on the cloudy river-water, perfect and familiar.

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*John Ash*

## The Monuments

Each year the monuments grew larger.
The citizens demanded this.
As their lives got worse they wanted
longer staircases to descend, towering fountains . . .

Taxes were increased. A famine settled in.
An inexplicable epidemic appeared.
Autumn was rain-sodden. So,
they collected funds for a new work

in the form of a giant, granite pineapple
encircled by a narrow staircase,
so difficult to climb some said
it symbolized life or friendship.

The monuments meant nothing of course.
The misfortunes seemed undeserved.
At parties the food was served
on plates in the form of clouds

that descended from the ceiling,
and under each unseasonal strawberry
a gold leaf was set. Despite these strategies
the general melancholy increased.

Poems concerned themselves
with childhood, autumn and failure,
although it was understood that these took the place
of events too unbearable to discuss.

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Work resumed on the pineapple.
It was decided to enclose it within a transparent
sphere inscribed with a poem concerning
autumn and failure. Meanwhile

in the downtown area, work began on a new
staircase, some 900 feet high, leading to
a colossal weeping eye. On rainy days
citizens would gather to watch the way

it vanished sweetly into mist,
but no one dared to place a foot
on even the lowest, shining step:
"This is art," they said, "We cannot use it."

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*Robert Bringhurst*

## Sunday Morning

*for Don McKay & Jan Zwicky*

Moonset at sunrise, the mind
dividing between them. The teeth
of the young sun sink through the breast of the cloud.
And a great white pelican rests in the bay,
on his way from Great Slave Lake
to Guatemala.
The mind is made out of the animals
it has attended.
In all the unspoken languages,
it is their names.

To know is to have no opinions: to know
meaning thinks, thinking means.
The mind is the place not already taken.
The mind is not-yet-gathered beads of water
in the teeth of certain leaves—
*Saxifraga punctata*, close by the stream
under the ridge leading south to Mount Hozameen,
for example—and the changing answers of the moon.
The mind is light rain gathered
on the ice-scarred rock, a crumpled mirror.

To be is to speak with the bristlecone
pines and the whitebarks,
glaciers and rivers, grasses and schists,
and if it is permitted, once also

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with pelicans. Being
is what there is room for in that
conversation. The loved is what stays
in the mind; that is, it has meaning,
and meaning keeps going. This
is the definition of meaning.

What is is not speech. What is
is the line between the unspeakable
and the already spoken.

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*Harold Brodkey*

## On First Being Published

*for Joanna Brown*

The scenes that were on the inside of his ribs,
when he willed them outward, they appeared,
tattooed, in front, behind, strips of pictures
to amuse the other prisoners.

Hell, he shook the silence with example.

You noticed then how young he was,
the blue-inked and white-flecked kid,
his electrified repose, the plotter's head,
the torso of a nude
beginner in early fitness clothed only in posted
hypotheses, odd adaptation for a moral wilderness,
unnatural existence, sexual fame,
your skin a public metaphor, your backside
sparkling with illustrations, the cicada-pulse
at your wrists and temples, the bone-bubbles
of your slouching spine—you register

the much-judged nudity, the central music
of the era: the sight of music can produce
a melancholy admiring ridicule.

A mad fragment of loneliness is on fire.

What part of art would you say
was timeless? Or one says
a trembling treetop gives birth
in the nervous explosion of sunlit leaves,
two orange-and-bright-black birds
like lamplight with black corners,
like spilled ink on burning paper,

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orioles in the first act
in a succession of escapes
tree to tree, a track,
commotion and a pulsing beauty
overseen by the red-shinned hawk
its wings half-loosened and half-tense
glorious feet half-skidding on an airy floor—
what is art? The published thing
is an act of science and of destiny,

two orioles and one is destiny
as exhibitionism as the civic duty
of a civil soul, a species matter decayed
into a present moment,
the scrawled patterns of the oriole,
the mind-like skin displayed,
the skinlike mind that is a tale,
the posing child: the talented and willful boy.

Let Truth be held to be a drunken wasp
unnaturally tattooed in tiger's stripes
in memory of Blake. A dangerous summer murmurer

is rehearsing courtship sermons to the sky
and us on present appetite and on kindness
as an escape from nature. Truth is overheard

coming from a bruised discarded pear
in its contingent and fermenting final dress,
a goaded truth, from an insect airborne
motorcyclist, decadent in the transparent light
and ready for the spirit's purposes
to be summer's and the autumn's symbol,
trophy meant to die for a species reason
fragrantly. These things yet inflect a moment
courteous with possibility, a climax
as unstable as the air, it is
a scribbled wine, the young man's
neighborhood half-astir
is one moment's half-successful argument.

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*Two Poems by Raymond Carver*

## Hope

> *"My wife," said Pinnegar, "expects to see me go to the dogs when she leaves me. It is her last hope."*
>
> D. H. Lawrence, "Jimmy and the Desperate Woman"

She gave me the car and two
hundred dollars. Said, So long, baby.
Take it easy, hear? So much
for twenty years of marriage.
She knows, or thinks she knows,
I'll go through the dough
in a day or two, and eventually
wreck the car—which was
in my name and needed work anyway.
When I drove off, she and her boy-
friend were changing the lock
on the front door. They waved.
I waved back to let them know
I didn't think any the less
of them. Then sped toward
the state line. I *was* hell-bent.
She was right to think so.
I went to the dogs, and we
became good friends.
But I kept going. Went
a long way without stopping.
Left the dogs, my friends, behind.

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Nevertheless, when I did show
my face at that house again,
months, or years, later, driving
a different car, she wept
when she saw me at the door.
Sober. Dressed in a clean shirt,
pants, and boots. Her last hope
was blasted.
She didn't have a thing
to hope for anymore.

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## Sleeping

He slept on his hands.
On a rock.
On his feet.
On someone else's feet.
He slept on buses, trains, in airplanes.
Slept on duty.
Slept beside the road.
Slept on a sack of apples.
He slept in a pay toilet.
In a hayloft.
In the Super Dome.
Slept in a Jaguar, and in the back of a pickup.
Slept in theaters.
In jail.
Behind the wheel.
On boats.
He slept in line shacks, and in a castle, once.
Slept in the rain.
In blistering sun.
On horseback he slept.
He slept in chairs, churches, in fancy hotels.
He slept under strange roofs all his life.
Now he sleeps under the earth.
Sleeps on and on.
Like an old king.

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*Amy Clampitt*

## Dorothy and William at Rydal Mount

"Now, I must tell you of our grandeur,"
she'd written. "We are going to have
a *Turkey*!!! carpet in the dining room . . .
You stare . . . 'Are they changed, are they
setting up for fine Folk . . .?'" Yes,

they were changed. One year had seen
comic, crippled Catharine, aged three,
and Thomas, of whom much had been expected,
buried in Grasmere churchyard; then
their father, already gray and elderly

at just past forty, set in a position:
Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland,
canvasser for the Lowthers, who all but
owned Penrith ("Sad, sad, sad," radical
John Keats would mutter, passing through).

Soon she'd be caught up with him in all
the brouhaha of a bought election. Yes,
there had been a change: De Quincey, so
lately of their household, so innocently
besotted with Catharine, married now

to opium and the simple girl he'd had a
bastard by. "Ruined," D. pronounced. And
paid no more visits. From Dove Cottage—
the talk there, the incandescent silences
beside the fire ("I hear nothing save

the breathing of my Beloved")—indeed
there was a change. Her brother wrote
now, grandly, of Mutability, of outward

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forms (unspecified) that melt away
like hoarfrost. Surprised by joy (he wrote),

he'd turned to share the transport—turned
to whom but Catharine, with a sublimity
he could no more come down from than she,
poor mite, in life could walk upright. Aloft
at such an eminence, he'd grown more craggy;

nobody argued with him; much wifely tact
was spent, a whole household of amanuenses
circled him on tiptoe. Reputation sealed in,
spicule by spicule, the old sore wounds—
grief, ridicule, the worm of conscience:

Annette and Caroline, the larger work undone.
Word came that Coleridge was dead. "A long
sit with knitting on my knee," his sister
noted in her diary. Words for the chill
he felt came more slowly: *power frozen*

*at its marvellous source . . . Our haughty*
*life is crowned with darkness, like London*
*with its own black wreath.* There had been
great alteration: that was the year
his sister—the ruin of her youth beset

by mass defections from within the body,
the firebrand of her old vivacity half-
quenched, a hutch of glowworms—in flight
from grandeur, vicissitude, fine Folk,
took refuge in the nunnery of madness.

Fits of verse, poured out from memory.
Churchwardens mocked. Unseemly noises.
Outbursts. Children and strangers kept away.
Small, shrunken, wild-eyed, she'd command
whoever came into her room to stir the fire.

There would be remissions. "News—news,"
she'd write. "I must seek for news. My

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own thoughts are a wilderness . . . The
laburnum with its naked seedpods shivers . . ."
"Stir the fire!" Her brother, poet laureate

since Southey died, obeys her, sits here
with her, watching: a doddering pair, like
gypsies camping out, the way they'd camped
one night at Tintern, the untended grandeurs
of a time gone dim gone dim behind them.

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*Alfred Corn*

## Apartment on 22nd St.

*for Darragh Park*

Because dusk comes in not long
after 5 o'clock in Chelsea
and lamps come to life, a gold
wash falling from them,
resting on the blue-and-white,
lighting small gold clouds
in the dark wood,
or pooling in circles on the carpet;
and presumable cars whisper by
as curling leaves rattle at
the windowsill and the late hour
settles in deeper, in tune,
it could be said, with Delius on FM;
and facts, severe but familiar,
adhere to velvet, to polish, glass
and silver, and to pictures of things.
Or because calm, the readable
representation of calm, is
an achieved thing, like the last
fine overlay of glaze or light;
and because, finally, one is
entitled to a signature, affixed
now much like a reliable fact,
briskly drawn, streamlined like the city—
the painter nods and lays down his brush.

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*Douglas Crase*

## Theme Park

Too much of a subject can interfere,
Be a drag, so subvert the procedure to which it refers
That the wisest course is to visit it just for fun,
Have fun, and make a clean getaway—wisdom
Already shed in the shiver of pilgrim foot
On the longed-for soil. Truly no one ahead,
Until this is where our lives become sweet and true,
Begun on the clumpy green with its circle of flowers,
Its flagpole and founders' memorial, map
Of self-guided tours, viewing sites, trail.
And farther, more deeply recessed and peacefuller
Still, the substantive structures themselves
Are seen meeting their needs in scale: shops,
Ammo dumps, taverns and houses of prayer. But
Who could be sure of a tenure except in this world,
Fair between the river and the sea?—where the birds
And the natives, so enthused by our coming,
Run back and forth like children on the shore.

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*James Dickey*

## Spring-Shock

All bubbles travelling

In tubes, and being lights: up down and around
They were: blue, red and every man uncaught
And guilty. Prison-paleness
Over the street between strobes
Unfailingly. But no light
On top of anything moving, until
The last, one:
one. Whoever it was switched it

Dead when he saw me. Winter; not dream-like
But a dream and cars
Of that. I took my stand where they were called
By absent law to stop, obstructedly raging

And I could not get in. All their windows
Were sealed and throbbing
With strobe, red and blue, red and blue

And go. One pulled out of the flight
Of others; pulled up and may have had back-road
Dust on it red dust in a last show
Of blue. A man in a cowboy hat rolled down

The window on my side. His voice
Was home-born Southern; Oklahoma, Texas,
Could have been. Manhandling my overcoat, I slid
In there with him. Central Park South, I said,
A war-safety zone; the St. Moritz.

He turned up

One of the streets with no lights. Into the seat
I settled; black buildings thickened

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Around us, high tenements flattening
Into squares; warehouses, now,
They were; maybe docks. I watched. No birds.
No trash-cans. The car died

Between two alley walls

And froze, and a voice at last, still
Out of Oklahoma, said "I want your money."

We were present
In silence. A brought-on up-backward thock

Took place, and on the fresh blade
A light alive in the hand
New-born with spring-shock. It was mine
At sixty. "I want your car," I said.

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*Tom Disch*

## MCMLXXXIV

### M

Two sharp eminences with a valley between
Through which the erratic witness of a loosened tongue
Flows to the sea: Mount M_____. Mark it well.
It is the same mystifying letter that masks
My middle name. At confirmation that became
Mark, but neither name nor sacrament stuck,
And I was tumbled into a universe
In which that M could stand for almost anything,
Into the infamous Modern World where meanings
Are all relative and relatives don't mean as much
As they did in A.D. 1000 in the Mediterranean basin
Where our earlier world-view was formed by conniving
Clerics (cf. Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family And Marriage in Europe*), but that's not to say
They don't mean a lot or we wouldn't be travelling
Thousands of miles to visit them, would we?
The engine hums, the road swerves, and the valley
Opens to a view of the Pacific. Wow. One sees at once
Why science believes the moon to have been
Scooped from its basin, for it is huge. Meanwhile,
High above our tiny Dodge (named for Aries, alias
The Ram), the angel of my middle name
Sings of sunlight, sea and shore, praises
The magma at earth's core, swings his censer,
Scents the air and shouts, Behold, am I not fair!

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## C

In the universe determined by the letter
C, the ocean seems invisible behind its security
Blanket of fog, as absconding as those gods we've chosen
Lately to disbelieve in, though the creeds
They taught us can still be professed at moments
Of uncertainty or stress. A hundred
Curious events happen here that happen nowhere
Else, coincidences too odd to credit
Except that we have seen them with our eyes:
Ice palaces created by the condensed December
Breath of sleeping bees; a replica in sugar cubes
Of Bernini's imposing colonnade; a great aluminum C
In Civil Rights Square formed from a hundred
Million crushed Pepsi cans commemorating Michelson
And Morley's epoch-making experiment of 1887 that proves
That everything moves at the same speed if viewed
From the right angle. Nor is that all there is to see,
For look up there at the peak some people call
The Crest of Charlemagne and others simply
Charlie's Nose. Lesser letters—an H, a D, an N,
Even the eager-beaver vowels—can't really compare.
O might be thought more all-encompassing
But it excludes too much, achieves closure
Too easily; it could never become, as C so often does,
A cradle or a caudle bowl. X is more versatile,
Will stand, quite literally, for any value you give it,
But you can't cuddle up to an X. U is the closest
Any letter comes to C, and it's certainly true
That I love U, but only because I learned to love
C first. C, this is for you. Love, T.

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## M

My, my, there it is again, the hum
Of the millenium—*Om*, *Om*—the tom-tom mantra
Of a mind that has become all mouth,
Hermetically sealed against sense
And immense with its own malarky:
Me, now, or Emma Bovary in a moment
Of immortal longing. Such a thin line
Separates madness from mediocrity,
Manna from mania, the lover's sigh *M'ama!*
And babyhood's redoubled cry *Mama, Mama!*
Is it then only Echo who answers Amen?
Is man to be blamed for insensate greed
If the maw to be filled was willed from time
Immemorial by the great I Am That I Am?
No one blames Him for His huge needs.
Place a microscopic microphone among
The thousand flowers where a millipede
Brunches and you will hear the same murmur
Of hunger appeased. *Mm*, purrs the millipede,
*Mm-good*. No doubt it is without nobility
Thus to yield to the messes we crave,
But did not the Lord who made the iamb
Make it to lie down with the yam?

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## L

How well, our anchormen ask us when news is scarce,
Or how poorly did Orwell score prophetically?
Is there fear in truth? Has anyone been bought and sold
This year we didn't usually buy and sell before?
What knell does curfew toll? Who put poor Pussy
In the well? How now do we spell Mao? Will Shell
Be swallowed whole by Exxon? Can we mend the crack
In Ma Bell's back? How long can we count on
Iran and Iraq to keep on the attack, and could other
Lesser breeds be trained at the same good work? Last
But not least, what rough beast, or rather what sorrow
Has Frank got in store for us tomorrow? Will there be
Mirth in Mudville or hell on earth? Will angels weep
An acid rain to see that man has lived in vain?
Will generals tire of their games, washing the poems
Of Sandinist rebels from their beaches? Will the tide turn?
Will the fire burn? And whom? Will empire gel in time
For the summer Olympics? *Quien sabe*? as our friends
Across the border say, and now here's Jane to explain
What that means and to tell us something old,
Something new, something borrowed, and something blue
About Ella Fitzgerald. Jane? We seem to be
Experiencing some technical difficulties, but please
Bear with us. We'll be back after this message.

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## XXX

Like as the wave makes toward the pebbled shore
And kisses it, so does her lustful customer kiss
The blistered whore, heedless of the risk of herpes,
Temporarily insane and then, after the sweetness
Of yielding, possessed by an equal giddiness
Retreating. So too the wave retires down the beach,
Rearranging all those pebbles, but then, as though
Not satisfied with that arrangement, returning
To kiss them again. So might a miser kiss
The gold doubloons and Louis D'or spread like butter
On the English muffin of her bed. Then, as that miser
(Think of Zazu Pitts in her final scenes in *Greed*)
Must restore her treasures to their trove, so does the sea
Rescind its outreachings, only upon consideration
To resume its kisses, as lovers do, unwearying, or
Even if wearying, renewing them anyhow the way that
Landlords must renew their tenants' leases, whether
They will or no, being compelled by laws they did not make
And cannot break, though they may (as ours has once again)
Take them back temporarily. The leases, that is, not the laws
Or the kisses, which are, as bottles once, non-returnable,
And which still along this pebbled shore accrue
Like interest to an IRA account compounded daily
In some microchip, its own small sea of data surging
In bits and bytes and Microsoft™ electric kisses
Of X and O, yes and no, stop and go, high tide
And low—which, as the moon is full, will come tonight at six,
When I in my high rubber boots with my little plastic bucket
Will once again be out on the beach, a sea-maddened
Tourist hunting for agates in the shingle, fleeing
The ocean's kiss and feeling, as I flee, its tingle.

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## IV

Slowly the level of the fluid climbs
Up through the branching plastic vines
Of library and club, inexorable as genealogy,
To where the brokers of power are sprawled
In leather wingback chairs. Beware, sirs,
O beware! Blue veins pulse in drooping hands.
A finger twitches and begins to itch, as the vines
Wreathe round oak legs and writhe up these half-alive
Forms, writhe up and twist in lissome nooses round
Limp wrists, flabby forearms, slumped shoulders,
To press at last against the carotids and plunge
The business-suited world in sleep. A hush
Falls o'er the quad. The widest eye, the best-laid brick
Cannot resist the balm of a long-predicted
Year-by-year-delayed demise. It comes,
Their demi-death, as no surprise, but as a kind
Of relaxation. Some mortar crumbles by
A caratid's toe; a liveried attendant
Hears the members snore and quietly removes
Cups and journals from their liver-spotted fingertips.
Can this be the end of the line? Can this be 1984?

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4. ~~THE CURSED CHILD~~ ~~THE BABY JESUS~~ ~~THE BOTTLED BABY JESUS~~

## THE LITTLE LORD JESUS

The first Christmas following my mother's death was the first Christmas I didn't spend in Sawyer's Depot. My grandmother told Aunt Martha and Uncle Alfred that if the family were altogether, my mother's absence would be too apparent -- and if Dan and Grandmother and I were alone in Gravesend, if the Eastmans were alone in Sawyer's Depot, my grandmother argued that we would all miss each other; then ~~maybe~~ she reasoned, we wouldn't miss my mother so much. Ever since ~~that~~ The Christmas of '53 I have felt that the yuletide in America is a special hell for those families who have suffered any loss or who must admit to any imperfection; the so-called spirit of giving can be as greedy as receiving -- Christmas is our time to be aware of what we lack, of who's not home.

Dividing my time between my grandmother's house on 80 Front Street and the abandoned dormitory where Dan had his little apartment also gave me my first impressions of Gravesend Academy at Christmas, when all the boarders [redacted] had gone home. The bleak brick ~~buildings~~ and stone dormitories and classroom buildings with their windows all equally closed -- with a penitentiary sameness -- gave the campus the aura of a prison enduring a hunger strike; and without the students hurrying on the quadrangle paths, the bare, bone-colored birches stood out ~~in~~ in black-and-white against the snow, like charcoal drawings of themselves, or skeletons of ~~former students~~ The alumni.

The ringing of the chapel bell, and the bell for class-hours, was suspended; and so my mother's absence was underlined by the absence of Gravesend's most routine music, the academy chimes I'd taken for granted -- until I couldn't hear them. There was only the solemn, hourly bonging of the great clock in the bell-tower of Hurd's Church; especially on the most brittle-cold days of December, and against the landscape of old snow -- thawed and refrozen ~~with~~ to the silver-gray sheen of a pearl -- the clock-bell of Hurd's Church tolled the time like a death knell.

*A manuscript page from John Irving's novel-in-progress,* A Prayer for Owen Meany.

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# The Art of Fiction XCIII

# John Irving

*John Winslow Irving was born on March 2, 1942, in Exeter, New Hampshire, and grew up on the campus of Phillips Exeter Academy, where his stepfather taught Russian history. Irving was a below-average prep school student, but a good enough wrestler to be admitted to the University of Pittsburgh, where he stayed for only a year. He then took German at Harvard summer school in preparation for courses at the Institute of European Studies and the University of Vienna. He married Shyla Leary in Greece. The couple then returned to the United States and the University of New Hampshire, where Irving studied creative writing with John Yount and*

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*Thomas Williams. He graduated* cum laude *in English in 1965, the year that his son Colin was born, and then went to the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop on a fellowship. His Master of Fine Arts thesis was* Setting Free the Bears, *a novel published in 1968. Sale of the movie rights to that book, and a job adapting it into a screenplay, allowed the Irvings to move into an Austrian castle, where their second son, Brendan, was born in 1970.* The Water-Method Man *appeared in 1972, the year Irving returned to the University of Iowa for three years as a writer-in-residence, where he completed* The 158-Pound Marriage. *In spite of good reviews, the book sold poorly, and Irving was compelled to take a job as an assistant professor of English at Mount Holyoke College. His fourth novel,* The World According to Garp, *was nominated for the 1978 National Book Critics' Circle Award and the National Book Award, and after great success as a paperback, won the 1980 American Book Award. Upon publication of* The Hotel New Hampshire *in 1981, John Irving was on the cover of* Time *magazine and his novel was number one on the best-seller lists, as was* The Cider House Rules, *a novel published in 1985. Since his divorce in 1982, Irving has been living in New York, splitting his time between an Upper East Side apartment and a restored eighteenth-century house that was moved from Vermont to eastern Long Island. A gym containing a wrestling mat is on the second floor of the barn.*

*Irving was interviewed in the cramped back room of his otherwise large and luxurious apartment in Manhattan. A jump rope hangs on the door, a heavy set of weights "is always in the way" on the floor, and by one window is a stationary bike that Irving uses on days he doesn't go to his private athletic club or jog in Central Park. He writes at a blue IBM typewriter beneath color photographs of his sons wrestling in prep school competitions and black-and-white photographs of himself in prep school and college matches. Among a great many books in the high bookcases are foreign editions of his novels in fifteen languages.*

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*On the day of this interview, he wore a tweed coat, a green plaid flannel shirt, blue jeans, and running shoes. Irving is a vigorous, brawny man with brown hair that is increasingly gray. His height is probably five-feet-eight and he weighs only twenty-five pounds more than the 136½ pounds he wrestled at years ago. He's a storyteller and a generous teacher; when asked a question, Irving pauses for so long a time it nearly seems his inner works have stopped, but once his reply has been fully considered, he replies at length in a gentlemanly, New England voice.*

INTERVIEWER

You're only forty-four and yet you've already published six big and important novels as well as a great many uncollected essays, stories, and reviews. How do you get so much work done?

JOHN IRVING

I don't give myself time off or make myself work; I have no work routine. I am compulsive about writing, I need to do it the way I need sleep and exercise and food and sex; I can go without it for a while, but then I need it. A novel is such a long involvement; when I'm beginning a book, I can't work more than two or three hours a day. I don't know more than two or three hours a day about a new novel. Then there's the middle of a book. I can work eight, nine, twelve hours then, seven days a week—if my children let me; they usually don't. One luxury of making enough money to support myself as a writer is that I can afford to have those eight, nine, and twelve hour days. I resented having to teach and coach, not because I disliked teaching or coaching or wrestling but because I had no time to write. Ask a doctor to be a doctor two hours a day. An eight-hour day at the typewriter is easy; and two hours of reading over material in the evening, too. That's routine. Then when the time to finish the book comes, it's back to those two and three hour days. Finishing, like beginning, is more careful

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work. I write very quickly; I rewrite very slowly. It takes me nearly as long to rewrite a book as it does to get the first draft. I can write more quickly than I can read.

INTERVIEWER

How do you begin a book?

IRVING

Not until I know as much as I can stand to know without putting anything down on paper. Henry Robbins, my late editor at E. P. Dutton, called this my enema theory: keep from writing the book as long as you can, make yourself *not* begin, store it up. This is an advantage in historical novels. *Setting Free the Bears* and *The Cider House Rules*, for example. I had to learn so much before I could begin those books; I had to gather so much information, take so many notes, see, witness, observe, study—whatever—that when I finally was able to begin writing, I knew everything that was going to happen, in advance. That never hurts. I want to know how a book feels after the main events are over. The authority of the storyteller's voice—of mine, anyway—comes from knowing how it all comes out before you begin. It's very plodding work, really.

INTERVIEWER

Have any of your novels changed drastically as you created them?

IRVING

Along the way accidents happen, detours get taken—the accidents turn out to be some of the best things. But these are not "divine" accidents; I don't believe in those. I believe you have constructive accidents en route through a novel only because you have mapped a clear way. If you have confidence that you have a clear direction to take, you always have confidence to explore other ways; if they prove to be mere digressions, you'll recognize that and make the necessary revisions. The more you know about a book, the freer you can be to fool around. The less you know, the tighter you get.

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INTERVIEWER

Could you give an example of one of those accidents?

IRVING

One such accident was Melony. I knew she was the force in *The Cider House Rules* that would get Homer Wells back to St. Cloud's; at first, of course, the reader is supposed to think that if Melony ever finds Homer, she'll kill him. And in a way, she does; she has the power to bring him up short. But what she kills is his illusion that he's living a good life. She's a moral force, not a lethal one; she's just as devastating to him as she would be if she were trying to kill him, really. She's the one who tells him his life is shabby and ordinary. She has the power to do that. I didn't know exactly what she would do, I mean physically, when she found him; then I thought of her frustrated rage in his bathroom, her very particular handling and dismantling of his things. I thought of that ugly, frightening weapon she constructs out of a toothbrush and a razor blade; she melts the toothbrush handle until it's soft enough to stick a blade in it; when the plastic hardens, she's got a lethal weapon. That's a frightening moment, but she just leaves it in his bathroom medicine cabinet; he cuts himself on it, by accident. "By accident," but it's no accident; it's a reminder to him of her potential for violence. That was a lucky discovery; it just fitted perfectly.

INTERVIEWER

Except for *The Water-Method Man*, which you've said was called *Fucking Up* as you wrote it, you seem to know your novel's title very early in your conception of it. Is it crucial to you to have a working title before you begin a project?

IRVING

Titles *are* important; I have them before I have books that belong to them. I have last chapters in my mind before I see first chapters, too. I usually begin with endings, with a sense of aftermath, of dust settling, of epilogue. I love plot, and how can you plot a novel if you don't know the ending first? How

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do you know how to introduce a character if you don't know how he *ends up*? You might say I back into a novel. All the important discoveries—at the end of a book—those are the things I have to know before I know where to begin. I knew that Garp's mother would be killed by a stupid man who blindly hates women; I knew Garp would be killed by a stupid woman who blindly hates men. I didn't even know which of them would be killed first; I had to wait to see which of them was the main character. At first I thought Jenny was the main character; but she was too much of a saint for a main character—in the way that Wilbur Larch is too much of a saint to be the main character of *The Cider House Rules*. Garp and Homer Wells are flawed; by comparison to Jenny and Dr. Larch, they're weak. They're main characters. Actors know how they end up—I mean how their *characters* end up—before they speak the opening lines. Shouldn't writers know at least as much about their characters as actors know? I think so. But I'm a dinosaur.

INTERVIEWER

How do you mean?

IRVING

I'm not a twentieth-century novelist, I'm not modern, and certainly not postmodern. I follow the form of the nineteenth-century novel; that was the century which produced the models of the form. I'm old-fashioned, a storyteller. I'm not an analyst and I'm not an intellectual.

INTERVIEWER

How about the analysts and intellectuals? Have you ever learned anything from reading criticism about your work? Do reviews please or annoy you, or do you pay too little attention to them for that?

IRVING

Reviews are only important when no one knows who you are. In a perfect world all writers would be well-enough known to not need reviewers. As Thomas Mann has written: "Our recep-

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tivity to praise stands in no relationship to our vulnerability to mean disdain and spiteful abuse. No matter how stupid such abuse is, no matter how plainly impelled by private rancors, as an expression of hostility it occupies us far more deeply and lastingly than praise. Which is very foolish, since enemies are, of course, the necessary concomitant of any robust life, the very proof of its strength." I have a friend who says that reviewers are the tickbirds of the literary rhinoceros—but he is being kind. Tickbirds perform a valuable service to the rhino and the rhino hardly notices the birds. Reviewers perform no service to the writer and are noticed too much. I like what Cocteau said about them. "Listen very carefully to the first criticisms of your work. Note just what it is about your work that the reviewers don't like; it may be the only thing in your work that is original and worthwhile."

INTERVIEWER

And yet you review books yourself.

IRVING

I write only favorable reviews. A writer of fiction whose own fiction comes first is just too subjective a reader to allow himself to write a negative review. And there are already plenty of professional reviewers eager to be negative. If I get a book to review and I don't like it, I return it; I only review the book if I love it. Hence I've written very few reviews, and those are really just songs of praise or rather long, retrospective reviews of all the writer's works: of John Cheever, Kurt Vonnegut, and Günter Grass, for example. And then there is the occasional "younger" writer whom I introduce to readers, such as Jayne Anne Phillips and Craig Nova. Another thing about not writing negative reviews: grown-ups shouldn't finish books they're not enjoying. When you're no longer a child, and you no longer live at home, you don't have to finish everything on your plate. One reward of leaving school is that you don't have to finish books you don't like. You know, if I were a critic, I'd be angry and vicious, too; it *makes* poor critics angry and vicious—to

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have to *finish* all those books they're not enjoying. What a silly job criticism is! What unnatural work it is! It is certainly not work for a grown-up.

INTERVIEWER

And what about fiction?

IRVING

Of course. What I do, telling stories, is childish work, too. I've never been able to keep a diary, to write a memoir. I've tried; I begin by telling the truth, by remembering real people, relatives and friends. The landscape detail is pretty good, but the people aren't quite interesting enough—they don't have quite enough to do with one another; of course, what unsettles me and bores me is the absence of plot. There's no story to my life! And so I find a little something that I exaggerate, a little; gradually, I have an autobiography on its way to becoming a lie. The lie, of course, is more interesting. I become much more interested in the part of the story I'm making up, in the "relative" I never had. And then I begin to think of a novel; that's the end of the diary. I promise I'll start another one as soon as I finish the novel. Then the same thing happens; the lies become much more interesting—always.

INTERVIEWER

Especially in your younger work, but even now, one gets the sense of a grown-up at play, of a very natural writer enjoying himself. Are you having as much fun writing now as when you began writing stories at Exeter?

IRVING

I can't say I have fun writing. My stories are sad to me, and comic too, but largely unhappy. I feel badly for the characters—that is, if the story's any good. Writing a novel is actually searching for victims. As I write I keep looking for casualties. The stories uncover the casualties.

INTERVIEWER

Some people say you write disaster fiction.

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IRVING

Such things don't happen? Is that what they mean? You bet I write disaster fiction. We have compiled a disastrous record on this planet, a record of stupidity and absurdity and self-abuse and self-aggrandizement and self-deception and pompousness and self-righteousness and cruelty and indifference beyond what any other species has demonstrated the capacity for, which is the capacity for all the above. I am sick of secure and smugly conventional people telling me that my work is bizarre simply because they've found a safe little place to live out the chaos of the world—and who then deny that this chaos happens to other, less fortunate people. If you're rich, are you permitted to say there's no poverty, no starvation? If you're a calm, gentle soul, do you say there's no violence except in bad movies and bad books? I don't make much up. I mean that. I am not the inventor I've been given credit for being. I just witness a different news—it's still news, it still is just what happens, but more isolated and well-described so you might notice it a little more clearly. George Santayana wrote: "When people say that Dickens exaggerates, it seems to me that they can have no eyes or no ears. They probably have only *notions* of what things and people are; they accept them conventionally, at their diplomatic value."

INTERVIEWER

Your literary debts to Charles Dickens, Günter Grass, and Kurt Vonnegut are pretty clear in your work, at least to some readers. How do you see their books contributing to your own?

IRVING

Well, yes, they're all fathers of my work, in a way. The polite world calls them extremists, but I think they are very truthful, very accurate. I am not attracted to writers by style. What style do Dickens, Grass and Vonnegut have in common? How silly! I am attracted to what makes them angry, what makes them passionate, what outrages them, what they applaud and find sympathetic in human beings and what they detest about human beings, too. They are writers of great emotional range. They are all disturbed—both comically and tragically—by who

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the victims of a society (or of each other) are. You can't copy that; you can only agree with it.

INTERVIEWER

How did your stay in Vienna contribute to your growth as a writer?

IRVING

Living with Vienna's history helped me look for history in my own work, make history for my characters, respect the passage of time as a finite kind of truth. I never really learned much about Vienna but I was taught to think about the past there—about my past, New England's past, and my characters' pasts.

INTERVIEWER

Have you studied the psychology of Sigmund Freud? Do you feel any kinship with his theories?

IRVING

I think Freud was a great novelist. Period.

INTERVIEWER

Period.

IRVING

Well, all right—a little more about that. Sigmund Freud was a novelist with a scientific background. He just didn't know he was a novelist. All those damn psychiatrists after him, they didn't know he was a novelist, either. They made simply awful sense out of his intuitions. People say Carl Jung is better, but Jung can't write! Freud was a wonderful writer! And what a storyteller! I don't think about his theories very much; sometimes they work, sometimes they don't fit at all, but when people say Freud was "wrong" about this or that, I have to laugh. Was Charles Dickens "wrong" about Fagin in *Oliver Twist*? I don't mean Fagin's Jewishness either—I mean, how could he have been "wrong" about Fagin as a character? What a great character! So I love reading Freud: the detail, the observations, the characters, the histories. The hell with the rest of it.

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INTERVIEWER

You say your work is becoming increasingly political.

IRVING

You're right: I said I was becoming more political. I know I said that. I'm not, though. I am becoming more social; I care that the social abuses, the social evils and ills of this and every other time be exposed, vividly. I am interested in exposing wrongdoing, good and evil, injustice. That I am active in political causes has been well-observed. I'm active, okay. But as a writer I am not interested so much in taking a political side as I am interested in exposing a corruption or an abuse (usually of an individual or group, but also by a law, or by a general indifference). Like Charles Dickens, I believe that society is a conditioning force, and often an evil force, but I also believe in absolutely good men and women, too. I read a critic of my work who found it ludicrous that I still wrote about "good" and "bad" people. Where has this man been? What has he seen? And I don't mean what literature has he read. I mean, what has he seen of the world? There *are* bad people in the world; and good ones, too. Society is responsible for much that is evil; but no one thing is responsible for everything. President Reagan would like the American people to believe that the liberals in this country, and the Communists outside this country, have made the world as bad as it is. He seems to be meeting with fair success with this lunatic proposition, too. A Marxist view of literature is offensive to me. Also, a feminist view of abortion: it is as offensive as a Catholic view, if you're not a Catholic.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think political considerations should be more important to American writers?

IRVING

Günter Grass and I were having dinner not long ago. He's a great hero of mine. And he said he wanted to keep his fiction pure, that is, free of politics; but when he was not writing fiction, he wanted to be as politically active as possible. A good way

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to live, but perhaps it is a more successful way for a West German novelist than for an American. Chancellor Willy Brandt had the wisdom to let Grass write for him. What American political figure would *dare* to have an American novelist write for him—write real details, real arguments, real right and wrong? I tell you, Kurt Vonnegut would be a better president than any president we've had since I've been voting. E. L. Doctorow would be pretty good too. And what would happen if Philip Roth volunteered to write campaign speeches for a presidential candidate? I doubt that the promise that the speeches would be more concrete and literate and wise and humane would much influence the people making the self-cancelling political "statements" that pass for speeches today. I doubt that any politician would hire Philip Roth or William Styron or Arthur Miller or any good writer you could name.

INTERVIEWER

How do you explain the comparative indifference of American novelists to national politics?

IRVING

I told Grass that there was no way for American writers to *be* politically active in this country. What we do, mainly, is join a general protest movement. We speak for causes; we speak to our friends; we speak to audiences already predisposed to agree with us. We have *zero* effect, in my opinion. We do a lot of political good deeds that make us feel self-righteous and not a part of the awful mainstream when yet another completely stupid and dangerous thing happens in this country. We say, complacently, "Well, I'm not part of that"; or, "As I said in *The Nation*"; or, "As I told the students at Stanford"; or, "When I was on The Today Show" (for two minutes)—and on and on. I think if we're going to be politically active, it *has* to start creeping into our novels. Günter Grass may feel he has an effect as a political activist in Germany, and maybe he does. He certainly has uncounted effect as a wonderful novelist. But what effect do we political activists have here? I'm impatient with what I see; more and more impatient. So I look for novels that

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will make people feel more and more uncomfortable about what's taken for granted in our society. Writers must describe the terrible. And one way to describe the terrible is to write comically, of course. George Bernard Shaw, who admitted to getting most of his satiric methods from Dickens, said that the thing to do is to find one true thing and exaggerate it, with levity, until it's obvious. I know it is not very postmodernist to be obvious, but politically one has to become more and more that way.

INTERVIEWER

Politically?

IRVING

Maybe I should stop using the word "political" and just claim that social observation is a writer's business; just to observe the society truthfully is, of course, being "political." I think New Englanders and Southerners have this in common, in their social observations, as writers: we recognize that America is a class society. People who differ from one another or draw lines between each other on matters of "taste" are a part of the class society, just as surely as wealth and power are parts of it. These are more than manners, in a society; these things politicize us. By demonstrating how Americans discriminate we are also being political, as writers. And as long as we have presidents who lie to us—who use language as irresponsibly as President Reagan uses it—we'll be political just by using language clearly. But I'm getting tired of blaming Reagan for being Reagan; the American people have to take responsibility for this man—they wanted him; they wanted him *twice*. He is never held accountable. His first reaction to Marcos' "victory" in the Phillipines was to advise Mrs. Aquino to "respect the democratic process," to accept her defeat gracefully—in other words. And in the face of so much alarming evidence, to say, as he did, that there had been manipulations of the vote by both sides—it was ridiculous. Well, in one sense, he didn't get away with it; Marcos is out. But five minutes later we hear the Reagan Administration taking credit for "the democratic process" in the Phillipines;

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do Americans simply forget what the man's first, terrible instincts were? They do appear to forget what he, literally, said. This is very troubling to writers; we couldn't have a president as irresponsible as this if the American people paid attention to language. The news is: language doesn't matter. But writers make language matter; we describe *exactly*. You see? Even caring about language becomes "political."

INTERVIEWER

Could you describe your involvement in the 1984 presidential campaign?

IRVING

I spoke for Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro and for the good guys running against the bad guys in North Carolina, Texas, Iowa, and Michigan. Campaigning was especially depressing on college campuses. I cared more about abortion rights than my audience of students who were fucking each other day and night and taking for granted that they would never have any trouble getting an abortion. I cared more about whether their generation was going to suffer another Vietnam in Central America—although, as I told them, *I* wouldn't be one of the Americans sent to die there, those Americans would come from *their* generation. A lot of well-fed, well-dressed, career-oriented young people smiled back at me with a kind of what's-he-worried-about? look on their faces. At the New School once some wit in the audience hollered out to me when I was talking about *The Cider House Rules*. The subject was migrant workers and the period in the late 1950s when I worked in the orchards with black apple pickers from the South, and I was saying that not much had changed for the migrants since then and that I felt great sympathy for poor people as a kid and I always wanted to write about them as truthfully as I could. And this jerk in the audience pipes up: "Will the migrants read it?" And there's a small chant from about two or three of his pals saying "Yeah!" And raised fists; shouts. I don't know exactly what their point was but they seemed to think they had made one—possibly, the migrants won't read it, therefore so

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what? Of course, if you know the book, you know that's one of my points about the migrants: they can't read! Anyway, I thought it was funny, and bewildering, and typical.

INTERVIEWER

How?

IRVING

People are angry—politically—and the last people they see as helping a political or just plain social situation are the artists and writers and intellectuals. And as a group we have been of next to no help in this country. Every administration thinks we're silly, not to be counted, and in the popular media, intellectuals and artists are always cast as totally unreliable and selfish people, as flakes and phonies and wimps altogether out of touch with the common man. Some problem, wouldn't you agree? I have an instinct for victims; that's all I can tell you. I see who gets hurt and I describe it. Do people like to see themselves as victims, or to hear about victims? In my experience, no.

INTERVIEWER

Probably no male writer has given as much serious attention as you have to the issues of adultery, rape, and now, with *The Cider House Rules*, abortion. Could you comment on that?

IRVING

I've been writing about one form or another of violence to women for years. And illegal abortion is simply a most sanctimonious form of violence against women. It is the most accepted form of violence in this country, violence against women. Rape is still funny, a wife is still the easiest person to beat up and get away with it, and the old line is still true: if men could get pregnant, don't imagine for a moment that anyone would be complaining about legalized abortion. Some conventionally smug people, eyes tightly closed, say that all this violence to women in my books—as if it happened only there!—is exploitative. Others, who think violence to women is perfectly okay, think I am just a man of quaint concerns, or one writing

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feminist tracts. The same idiot who called *The World According to Garp* a feminist tract, by the way, also called *The Cider House Rules* sadistic to women. Does he mean I've changed? Does he even know what he means?

INTERVIEWER

You worked on a screenplay of *Setting Free the Bears* and on the acknowledgments page of *The Water-Method Man* you thanked that project's director, Irvin Kershner, "for a valuable and exciting film experience"; and yet, since then you've rejected every opportunity to become involved in screen adaptations of your novels. Why?

IRVING

Well, movies, movies, movies—they are our enemy, of course. Movies are the enemy of the novel because they are replacing novels. Novelists shouldn't write for the movies, unless, of course, they discover they're no good at writing novels. I learned a lot from Kershner, who's a dear friend of mine to this day, but I hated writing the script. I like people who make movies, and I'm glad some of them, who are terribly smart, are not writing novels. There are enough people writing novels, God knows. Anyway, the main thing I learned by writing a screenplay of *Setting Free the Bears* for Kershner was that screenwriting isn't really writing; it's carpentry. There's no language in it, and the writer is not in control of the pace of the story, or of the tone of the narration, and what else is there to be in control of? Tony Richardson told me that there *are* no screenwriters, so there is at least one director who agrees with me. It could be that it was the most valuable thing I ever did—to have my shot at writing a movie when I was so young, right after my first novel was published—because I was never tempted to do it again.

INTERVIEWER

Have you generally liked the films made of *The World According to Garp* and *The Hotel New Hampshire*?

IRVING

I helped George Roy Hill with *The World According to Garp*;

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that is, I commented to him on the Steve Tesich screenplay, and looked at some of the shooting and the rushes, and I even played a small part as a wrestling referee—that wasn't acting, by the way; for years I used to *be* a wrestling referee. My kids got in the movie, too; they had a ball. And George is one of my best friends now. He did a good job with *The World According to Garp*; he took it to the suburbs and gave all the characters haircuts and made them much nicer than they were in the book, but he was true to the domestic line, to the main, linear narrative. He's a good storyteller, George; witness what a good job he did with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and look at *The Sting*. Good narrative. He was the right director for *The World According to Garp*. What's missing from that film is, of course, nine-tenths of the book, but George was faithful to what he could do. And that's another reason I'm not interested in writing for the movies, personally: the main job in making a movie out of a novel by me is to throw away nine-tenths of the novel. Why would that be any fun for me? Tony Richardson took a more difficult route with *The Hotel New Hampshire*. He was not as literal as George, and the storytelling is jumpier, but he tried to make it a proper fairytale, which it is—people in Europe seemed to understand that better than they understood it here (in both the book and the movie). I thought Tony took great risks with that movie and I thought the film was sweet, charming. It had a better beginning and ending than a middle. It was originally going to be in two parts but Tony couldn't solve the two-part screenplay—isn't it hysterical how movie people talk about "solving" scripts?—and he couldn't get anyone to finance a movie in two parts either. Then he truncated what he had into one film, and that hurt; that kind of cartooned the characters, made it too speeded-up, at least for people who didn't know the book. But he made every frame of it with love and zest; there's nothing cynical about Tony.

INTERVIEWER

As far as I know, the stories in *The World According to Garp* are the last you've done. Do you intend to work with short fiction again?

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IRVING

No. I can't write a good story. The closest thing to a good story I ever wrote was "The Pension Grillparzer," and the reason I worked as hard as I did on that story was that I was writing it for T. S. Garp—I had to establish that my character was the real thing, that he could really write. I would never have worked on a story of my own that hard. I just don't care for the short story form. The summations, the closed doors, the focus; not for me. I won't ever write another story—except perhaps a story entirely meant to be read or spoken aloud. Something exactly forty-five minutes to an hour in length, and never to be published, just to be *said*. Once I publish something I usually don't enjoy reading aloud from it anymore, but I read "The Pension Grillparzer" aloud, to public audiences, seventy-three times. Once a young woman spoke to me after a reading. "I've heard you read a dozen times," she said. She'd traveled from New York to California, to Vermont, to Missouri, to Iowa, to South Carolina. And all she ever got to hear was "The Pension Grillparzer." She looked a trifle disturbed. "I keep thinking you'll read something different," she said peevishly. I never read the story again. But now I feel like trying it again; the story is simply a length that is perfect, and it's self-contained. I don't have anything else like it. I like public readings, but the chapters of all my novels, lately, are one and a half or two hours of reading; and cutting them down doesn't improve them; and all the necessary things one has to say to introduce chapters, or parts of chapters, from a novel-in-progress . . . it's frustrating.

INTERVIEWER

How about the books of your contemporaries? Are you a good reader?

IRVING

My contemporaries: of course, I read them. Or I begin them. Among my favorites: Kurt Vonnegut, of course—he's the most original American writer since Mark Twain and the most humanitarian writer in English since Charles Dickens. And Günter Grass, of course. I loved John Cheever; I knew his territory and

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I liked his sense of mischief and fair play—always at war with each other. And I really value my friendships with any number of writers I admire: Joseph Heller, Gail Godwin, John Hawkes, Stanley Elkin, Peter Matthiessen, Robertson Davies . . . well, there isn't a "complete" list. I generally like other writers; I try to meet every writer I can—and read any book that anyone tells me about.

INTERVIEWER

How do you think this period in American literature measures up against earlier ones?

IRVING

As for my view of the contemporary novel . . . well, as I've said so many times: I'm old fashioned. I believe in plot, of all things; in narrative, all the time; in storytelling; in character. Very traditional forms interest me. This nonsense about the novel being about "the word" . . . what can that mean? Are we novelists going to become like so many modern poets, writing only for and to each other, not comprehensible to anyone who isn't another writer? I have only a prep school education in the poems of John Milton. Yet I can read Milton; I really understand him. All that time has passed, and yet he's still clear. But when I read the poems of someone my own age and can't understand a single thing, is that supposed to be a failure of my education, or of the poetry?

INTERVIEWER

*Setting Free the Bears*, *The Water-Method Man* and *The 158-Pound Marriage* were innovative, or at least postmodernist, in their designs, in their mixing of points of view or first and third-person narrative, in their great concern for language. Your novels after them have been less concerned with experiments in storytelling and more concerned with the story itself. How do you account for that?

IRVING

The novel is a popular art form, an accessible form. I don't enjoy novels that are boring exercises in show-off writing with

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no narrative, no characters, no *information*—novels that are just an intellectually discursive text with lots of style. Is their object to make me feel stupid? These are not novels. These are the works of people who want to call themselves writers but haven't a recognizable form to work in. Their subject *is* their technique. And their vision? They have no vision, no private version of the world; there is only a private version of style, of technique. I just completed an introduction to *Great Expectations* in which I pointed out that Dickens was never so vain as to imagine that his love or his use of language was particularly special. He could write very prettily when he wanted to, but he never had so little to say that he thought the object of writing was pretty language. The broadest novelists never cared for that kind of original language. Dickens, Hardy, Tolstoy, Hawthorne, Melville: to such novelists, originality with language is mere fashion; it will pass. The larger, plainer things they are preoccupied with, their obsessions—these will last: the story, the characters, the laughter and the tears.

INTERVIEWER

How helpful were your years spent at the Iowa Writers' Workshop?

IRVING

I was not necessarily "taught" anything there as a student, although I was certainly encouraged and helped—and the advice of Vance Bourjaily, Kurt Vonnegut, and José Donoso clearly saved me some valuable time; that is, they told me things about my writing and about writing in general that I would probably have figured out for myself, but time is precious for a young writer. I always say that this is what I can "teach" a young writer: something he'll know for himself in a little while longer; but why wait to know these things? I am talking about technical things, the only things you can presume to teach, anyway.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of the more important "technical" things?

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IRVING

"Voice" is a technical thing; the choice to be close to this character, distant from that character—to be in this or that point of view. You can learn these things; you can learn to recognize your own good and bad habits, what you do well in the first-person narrative voice, and what you do to excess, for example; and what the dangers and advantages are of a third-person narrative that presumes historical distance (the voice of a biographer, for example). There are so many stances involved, so many postures you can assume while telling a story; they can be much more deliberate, much more in a writer's control, than an amateur knows. The reader, of course, shouldn't be aware of much of this. It's brilliant, for example, how Grass calls Oskar Matzerath "he" or "Oskar" at one moment, and then—sometimes in the same sentence—he refers to little Oskar as "I"; he's a first-person narrator *and* a third-person narrator in the same sentence. But it's done so seamlessly, it doesn't call attention to itself; I *hate* those forms and styles that call great attention to themselves.

INTERVIEWER

You've also said you made some valuable friendships as a teacher at Iowa.

IRVING

Yes. Especially with Gail Godwin, Stanley Elkin, and John Cheever.

INTERVIEWER

And you met J. P. Donleavy at Iowa.

IRVING

I like meeting other writers, and Iowa City is a good place to meet them, but I didn't enjoy Donleavy. John Cheever and I, who were in a particularly ritualized habit of watching Monday Night Football together, while eating homemade pasta, were happy to hear that Donleavy was coming. We'd both admired

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*The Ginger Man* and we wanted to meet the author. I went to the airport to meet him; I'd written three novels—but not yet *The World According to Garp*; I wasn't famous. I didn't expect Donleavy to have read anything of mine, but I was surprised when he announced that he read no one living; then he asked if we were in Kansas. I told him a little about the Workshop, but he was one of those writers with no knowledge about writing programs and many prejudices about them: to be a student of writing was a waste of time; better to go out and suffer. He was wearing a very expensive three-piece suit, very handsome shoes, and handling a very posh walking stick at the time, and I began to get irritated. In a meeting with Workshop students, he told them that any writer who was lowering himself by teaching writing wasn't capable of teaching them anything. And so I was quite cross by the time I had to pick up the great man and drive him to his reading. I said we would be taking Mr. Cheever with us to the reading, and that both Mr. Cheever and I were great admirers, and that although I knew Mr. Donleavy did not read anyone living, he should know that Mr. Cheever was a wonderful writer. His short stories were models of the form, I said. But when I introduced Cheever to Donleavy, Donleavy wouldn't even look at him; he went on talking to his wife, about aspirin, as if Cheever wasn't there. I tried to say a few things about why so many American writers turned to teaching—as a way of supporting themselves without having to place the burden of making money upon their writing; and as a way of giving themselves enough time to practice their writing, too. But Donleavy wasn't interested and he said so. The whole trip he was taking was tiresome; the people he met, the people everywhere, were tiresome, too. And so Cheever and I sat up front in the car, excluded from the conversation about the evils of aspirin, and driving the Donleavys about as if they were unhappy royalty in a hick town. I will say that Mrs. Donleavy appeared to suffer her husband's rudeness, or perhaps she was just suffering her headache. Cheever tried a few times to engage Donleavy in some conversation, and as Cheever was as gifted in conversation as any man I have ever met, I grew more and more furious at Donleavy's coldness and

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unresponsiveness and *total* discourtesy. I was thinking, frankly, that I should throw the lout in a puddle, if there was one handy, when Cheever spoke up. "Do you know, Mr. Donleavy," Cheever said, "that no *major* writer of fiction was ever a shit to another writer of fiction, except Hemingway—and he was crazy?" That was all. Donleavy had no answer. Perhaps he thought Hemingway was still a living writer and therefore hadn't read him, either. Cheever and I deposited the Donleavys at the reading, which we spontaneously decided to skip. It was many years later that I met and became friends with George Roy Hill, who told me that he'd been a roommate of "Mike" Donleavy at Trinity College, Dublin, and that "Mike" was just a touch eccentric and surely not a bad sort. But I remembered my evening with Cheever and told George that, in my opinion, Donleavy was a *minor* writer, a shit, or crazy—or all three. I should add that drinking wasn't the issue of this unpleasant evening; Cheever was not drinking; Donleavy wasn't drunk—he was simply righteous and acting the prima donna. I feel a little like I'm tattling on a fellow schoolboy to tell this story, but I felt so awful—not for myself but for Cheever. It was such an outrage: that Donleavy—this large, silly man with his walking stick—was *snubbing* John Cheever. I suppose it's silly that I should *still* be angry, but George Plimpton told me that Donleavy has a subscription to *The Paris Review**; this presents an apparent contradiction to Donleavy's claim that he doesn't read anyone living, but it gives me hope that he might read this. If the story embarrasses him, or makes him angry, I would say we're even; the evening embarrassed Cheever and me, and made us angry, too.

INTERVIEWER

John Cheever's fiction was frequently informed by a Christian sensibility. How about your own? Are you a religious man?

IRVING

I am *now*. I had the usual, faint-hearted church experiences of an average New England Protestant. I was a Congregation-

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alist; then I became an Episcopalian because more of my friends went to that Sunday school than to the Sunday school in the Congo, as we used to call it. And if I have a preference now it's Congregational again, although I'm still cross with them for consolidating—you know, they kind of unionized, like all the other churches, and I liked them better the old way, when they were independent from all the other churches, even all the other so-called Congregational churches; that was more Yankee, that was very New England. I'm actually writing a religious novel now. What I mean by that is that I'm writing a novel that begs the reader to believe in a miracle. It's a small enough miracle to be fairly universally believed, I hope; and it's a questionable enough "religious experience" to be exactly that, to a religious reader, and acceptable on other terms to my readers who are not believers. I'm a believer, by the way. Haven't always been. And there's a day every now and then when I'm frankly worried, or just your average doubter. Well, for the sake of the new novel, I am bolstering up what belief I have. I'm a very conventionally religious person—you know, I find it easier to "believe" when I'm physically *in* a church, and I kind of lose touch with the feeling of how to pray when I slip away from the church for very long.

INTERVIEWER

Are you willing to say anything more about the novel you're working on?

IRVING

It will be called *A Prayer for Owen Meany.* It's about this little guy—both a hero and a victim—who believes that he's been appointed by God, that he's been specially chosen; and that the rather terrible "fate" he encounters is all part of his divine assignment. And it's the writer's job, isn't it, to make the readers wonder if maybe this isn't entirely true? Even the doubters. I have to convince them of little Owen Meany's special appointment in the universe, too. In that sense, maybe, writing a novel is always a religious act, in that we have to believe that our characters *are* appointed—even if only by us—

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and that their acts are not accidents, their responses not random. I don't believe in accidents. That's another aspect of how old-fashioned I am, I guess.

INTERVIEWER

You're a public figure now. Does that interfere with your goals as a writer?

IRVING

No.

INTERVIEWER

You don't have a drinking problem. In fact, your capacity for serious exercise is well-known; you're in good shape. But so many writers drink to excess. I've heard you lay the blame on what's *wrong* with this or that book on the author's drinking problem. You've said, for example, that the reason both Hemingway and Fitzgerald wrote their best books in their twenties (they were twenty-seven when they wrote *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*) is that they "pickled their brains." Do you really believe that?

IRVING

Yes, I really believe that. They should have gotten better as they got older; *I've* gotten better. We're not professional athletes; it's reasonable to assume that we'll get better as we mature—at least, until we start getting senile. Of course, some writers who write their best books early simply lose interest in writing; or they lose their concentration—probably because they want to do other things. But Hemingway and Fitzgerald really lived to write; their bodies and their brains betrayed them. I'm such an incapable drinker, I'm lucky. If I drink half a bottle of red wine with my dinner, I forget who I had dinner with—not to mention everything that I or anybody else said. If I drink more than half a bottle, I fall instantly asleep. But just think of what novelists do: fiction writing requires a kind of memory, a vigorous, invented memory. If I can forget who I had dinner with, what might I forget about my novel-in-progress? The irony

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is that drinking is especially dangerous to novelists; memory is vital to us. I'm not so down on drinking for writers from a moral point of view; but booze is clearly not good for writing *or* for driving cars. You know what Lawrence said: "The novel is the highest example of subtle interrelatedness that man has discovered." I agree! And just consider for one second what drinking does to "subtle interrelatedness." Forget the "subtle"; "interrelatedness" is what makes novels work—without it, you have no narrative momentum; you have incoherent rambling. Drunks ramble; so do books by drunks.

INTERVIEWER

How big is your ego?

IRVING

It grows a little smaller all the time. Being an ex-athlete is good for losing ego. And writing, in my opinion, is the opposite of having ego. Confidence as a writer should not be confused with personal, egotistical confidence. A writer is a vehicle. I feel the story I am writing existed before I existed; I'm just the slob who finds it, and rather clumsily tries to do it, and the characters, justice. I think of writing fiction as doing justice to the people in the story, and doing justice to *their* story—it's not *my* story. It's entirely ghostly work; I'm just the medium. As a writer, I do more listening than talking. W. H. Auden called the first act of writing "noticing." He meant the vision—not so much what we make up but what we *witness.* Oh, sure: writers "make up" the language, the voice, the transitions, all the clunking bridges that span the story's parts—that stuff, it's true, is invented. I am still old-fashioned enough to maintain that what *happens* in a novel is what distinguishes it, and what happens is what we *see.* In that sense, we're all just reporters. Didn't Faulkner say something like it was necessary only to write about "the human heart in conflict with itself" in order to write well? Well, I think that's all we do: we find more than we create, we simply see and expose more than we fabulate and invent. At least I do. Of course, it's necessary

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to make the atmosphere of a novel more real than real, as we say. Whatever its *place* is, it's got to feel, concretely, like a place with richer detail than any place we can actually remember. I think what a reader likes best is memories, the more vivid the better. That's the role of atmosphere in fiction: it provides details that feel as good, or as terrifying, as memories. Vienna, in my books, is more Vienna than Vienna; St. Cloud's is more Maine than Maine.

INTERVIEWER

One of the predominant characteristics of your protagonists is that they gain success in their occupations without any formal training—T. S. Garp skips college altogether, Lilly Berry publishes a novel while still a teenager, Homer Wells practices obstetrics without a medical degree—and yet you earned a graduate degree and you've worked as a professor at a number of colleges. How do you account for this disparity between your own experience and that of your characters? Are you implying that higher education is unnecessary?

IRVING

I needed prep school; I needed the experience of going to school, or having to struggle in school, and I needed that much education. And I got quite a lot of education at Exeter, by the way; at least I learned how to learn, how to find things out. There's another key to education: you learn how to pay *enough* attention, even though you're bored. A very important trick for a writer to pick up. But college was a waste of time for me. I stopped paying attention after I left Exeter—I stopped paying attention in school, I mean. By then I already wanted to write; I was already a reader. I wanted more time—to read more and more novels, and to practice my own writing. That's all I wanted to do, and all that really benefited me: reading lots of other novels, and practicing my own writing. Of course, you do get to read some novels in college, but you also have to waste all that time talking about them and writing about them, when you could be reading more novels.

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INTERVIEWER

How about writing classes?

IRVING

Writing classes bought me time, and they gave me a little audience. And Thomas Williams and John Yount at the University of New Hampshire were very important to me; they encouraged me and they criticized me, and that saved me time, too. I would have learned what they taught me somewhere, sometime, eventually, but it was wonderful for me to learn it then, and from them. And Kurt Vonnegut was important to me at Iowa, as you already know. But I'm talking about three other *writers* who patted me on the head and passed a pencil over my sentences—I didn't need the *college* part of the education. I suppose I *did* need those silly degrees, because I wouldn't have gotten a teaching job without those degrees, and teaching was an honorable and not-too-time-consuming way to support myself (which I needed to do) in those years I was writing the first four books. So that's always been true of an education, isn't it? You get one, you get a better job—right? But if I was a good teacher—and I was—it was because I had read a lot of novels and I had written and written and written; that provided me with the substance, with what I actually taught. I didn't need college to be a writer; I needed what a lot of people need from so-called higher education: the credentials! And let's tell the truth: I wouldn't have been given those college teaching positions simply because I had a B.A. and an M.F.A. I got those jobs because I published. School didn't help me get published.

INTERVIEWER

How did you first get published?

IRVING

I was lucky from the start. Tom Williams sent a couple of my undergraduate short stories to his agent, Mavis McIntosh. She sold one, "A Winter Branch," to *Redbook* for $1,000, and so I had an agent. She retired less than a year later and passed me along to Peter Matson, who's been my agent ever since. That's

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my longest literary-business relationship, and he's also one of my dearest friends. Now that's lucky, that Peter and I were right for each other; that's good luck. And Peter found me Joe Fox at Random House, and Fox was very good for me, too—a good editor, a good man with a pencil, which I needed. And when Random House wasn't exactly promising to change their ways and pull out all the stops for *The World According to Garp*, it was Fox who gave me the right advice: to leave him. That's class. And Henry Robbins published *Garp* at Dutton, and that was a success. The first unlucky thing that happened to me in publishing was that Henry died. He was a lovely man and it crushed me. But the Dutton people did their best—a very young editor named Jane Rosenman did a good job with me and *The Hotel New Hampshire.* And then I met Harvey Ginsberg, who was actually an old friend of Henry's—a classmate at Harvard—and just when I'm writing *The Cider House Rules*, where does it turn out that Harvey is from? Bangor, Maine. You think that's not lucky? And so now Harvey and I are together at William Morrow, and I'm so happy I don't have plans to change publishing houses. How many writers do you know who'll say that? Hear many happy publishing stories? I've been *very* lucky, and I know it, and I'm grateful. So much bitterness exists between writers and their publishers and representatives, but I've been spared it, and that means I can think about my writing instead of worrying about how I'm published—which provides many writers I know with an absolutely crippling distraction. You have to eliminate the distractions. You've got to keep focused.

**—Ron Hansen**

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# *Lauda* by Czesław Miłosz

## An Introductory Note

*"From the Rising of the Sun" was originally published by a distinguished Polish émigré press, Instytut Literacki, in Paris in 1974 in a volume which bore the name of the title poem,* Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada. *When its author, Czesław Miłosz, received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, and his work was briefly available in his own country, where it had not been reprinted for almost thirty years, the volume—for which crowds lined the streets outside bookstores in many Polish cities—published this time by Wydawnictwo Znak in Kraków, bore the same title. An English version of the poem, translated by Mr. Miłosz and Lillian Vallee, had appeared in the Ecco Press volume,* Bells in Winter, *in 1978, and it was through this translation that the poem had become known to English and American readers.*

*But the 1978 version of "From the Rising of the Sun" is incomplete; it omits the long third section of the poem, "Lauda," presumably because the translators felt that the Polish and Lithuanian materials were too exotic for American readers, or perhaps because the long quotations from ancient wills and documents defied translation. Since 1978, however, the entire poem has been translated into most European languages and some Asian ones. Scholars have studied it, and several younger American poets, excited by its freedom of movement and by its emotional and philosophical breadth, have written about it enthusiastically. It had become clear that it was unsatisfactory to have only a truncated version of "From the Rising of the Sun" available in English.*

*The materials of "Lauda" are likely to be unfamiliar, and a little history might help. The title refers, among other things, to the rural region where its author was born in what is now a westerly province of the U.S.S.R. It was, before that, a part*

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*of a province of the Polish-Lithuanian Respublica, and before that a settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. You will not find it on most maps, but not for the reason that you cannot find Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County or Hardy's Wessex. The county or district of Samogitia, in which Lauda is located, is real enough, but like the small towns of Maine or New Hampshire, it is too small and too obscure to have attracted the attention of the makers of atlases. It is east and north of Warsaw, and due north of the small Lithuanian city of Kaunas—Kovno in Polish—which you may find on the map, and west and north of Vilnius—Wilno, in Polish—the university town where Czesław Miłosz attended school.*

*That each of these cities—Kaunas-Kovno, Vilnius-Wilno—has two different names is part of what the poem is about. To understand it, one needs to look a long way back. The part of the world that we know as Poland was settled by tribes of the West Slavs before the time of Christ. To the east of them, in a heavily forested country full of glacier-carved rivers and at least two thousand lakes, were the Lithuanians, who are not Slavic in origin. Their language—this is another of the subjects of "Lauda"—is the oldest surviving Indo-European tongue, and it is closely related to Sanskrit. The two peoples and their territories were Polonia and Livonia to late Roman historians.*

*Poland was Christianized in* 966 A.D. *Lithuanians were the last European people to accept Christianity, in 1386, and even that formal conversion was more political than religious. At the time, a peculiar early medieval organization, the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary's Hospital at Jerusalem, was harassing all the peoples along the Baltic shore. The Knights were a religious brotherhood formed by north German merchants to maintain hospitals and perform works of charity during the Third Crusade. They had evolved from a charitable organization into a military club and then into a semi-piratical corporation. In the thirteenth century they were operating out of Prussia, seizing towns all along the Baltic coast and conducting raids downriver against the pagan Lithuanians and the insufficiently Christian Poles.*

*The military threat drove Lithuania and Poland into a polit-*

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*ical alliance. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at that time, extended well into Byelorussia and the Ukraine, so together the two countries controlled a good deal of northeastern Europe. They defeated the Teutonic Knights in 1410 and in 1569 the Polish-Lithuanian Respublica, including Poland, Lithuania, and much of the Ukraine, was formed. It lasted for over two hundred years, to collapse in 1795 when Russia, Prussia, and Austria, in the tide of reaction against the French revolution, carved the country up so that it, as a political entity, ceased to exist.*

*In the river valley with which "Lauda" is concerned, the effect of the invasions by Teutonic Knights was to create a social order. Regions—including the four places with which the poem is concerned: Lauda, Wędziagoła, Opitołoki, Swiętobrość (these are their Polish, not their Lithuanian names)—were organized into towns to defend the country against the invaders, or if not towns, manors which were responsible for the defense of the land and the peasantry, and to which the peasants were responsible. These landowners, from men who worked their own farms to the owners of considerable estates, became the nobility of the Respublica.*

*Readers should not be confused by the term "noble." It meant—at least in those early days—any owner of property, even a small farmer. A nobleman was a gentleman; he did not need to be grand; the title accorded him, whether he was rich or poor, certain rights, such as trial by jury and a vote in local assemblies of landowners which were called diets. It was into this class that the author was born in 1911, and it was by then much more intricately—and very frankly—stratified, since some of the poem turns on the comedy of the fact that the Miłosz family's particular branch of the gentry was called technically "better than Lauda."*

*This social order created some problems in translation and the translators groped for equivalent terms. The "petty gentry" familiar to readers of Russian novels were, for the most part, small farmers—yeomen farmers, the English would have called them, and the English would not have regarded them as gentlemen. Miłosz's class was a cut above that, socially. One could evoke the country squires in Fielding's* Tom Jones *or Turgenev's*

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Nest of Gentlefolks, *perhaps. They were not aristocrats, by any means; there was also a "half-aristocracy," and they were not that, either. They were landowners, not necessarily well-to-do, but able to send their children to the university and to enter them in the professions. Miłosz's father was an engineer; one of his cousins, rather more elegantly connected, became an important French poet; he himself was trained for the law.*

*The important fact about the nobility was that they were Polish in language and customs. The domination of Lithuania by Polish culture was underway as early as the formation of the Respublica in 1569. Some landowners were Polish, and Lithuanian landowners acquired Polish manners and spoke the Polish language. By the sixteenth century, Lithuanian was almost exclusively the language of the peasantry. The relation between the two languages was not unlike the relation between English and Welsh or Gaelic, and indeed the Teutonic Knights had harried Lithuania in more or less the same fashion and at the same time that the Anglo-Normans in England set out to dominate the pagan Welsh, led by the legendary Arthur and the priest Merlin who, like the Lithuanians, venerated oak trees. (Just how wild the country was may be gathered from the fact that in the sixteenth century men in Lithuania still hunted the European bison long after it was extinct everywhere else in Europe.)*

*Languages do die. The house where the last native speaker of Cornish, an old woman, died just before the Battle of Britain may be visited, and you can read the plaque on the door — in English — which commemorates that fact. The revival of literary Lithuanian — another theme of "Lauda" — began in the mid-nineteenth century in the surge of nationalism which spread across Europe in those years. It awakened old conflicts — which were only partly class conflicts — between Poles and Lithuanians. These conflicts flared in Miłosz's youth. They were not so violent as the conflict between the English and the Irish — many Poles favored Lithuanian national aspirations, and Poland had never treated Lithuania with the brutality which has always characterized the English relation to Ireland — but the Polish gentry of Lithuania were in a position not dissimilar to that of the Anglo-*

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*Irish gentry. The difference was this: there had existed in a common past a Respublica, a nation in which speakers of Polish, Lithuanian, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, German and Yiddish had lived side by side and enjoyed some of the same civil liberties.*

*Miłosz's childhood and young adult life were spent in a time of conflict between nationalisms as well as classes. Soon, these local arguments were overwhelmed by the German ultra-nationalist Nazis to the west and the internationalist Russian communists to the east, each intent in their own way on obliterating the identity of both Lithuanians and Poles. (Stalin, it will be remembered, first came to the attention of his superiors because of an article he wrote about the national aspirations of the Georgians; he recommended that they be encouraged as long as they were useful and then, when they were not, crushed.) This vise – and the author's first-hand experience of it – defines something of the political implication of "Lauda" and of the metaphysical and visionary thrust of "From the Rising of the Sun" as a whole.*

*Miłosz, young in the 1930s, was a man of the left, an enemy of the Polish version of ultra-nationalism, not completely unlike fascism, into which Polish society was drifting in the 1930s under the rule of a military junta – a "government of colonels." But he was not a communist, partly because communism in that part of the world was Russian. His part of Lithuania had been ruled by Russia since the breakup of the Respublica in 1795. His father was employed by the Russian army as a civil engineer, and his baptismal certificate – as he notes in "Lauda" – was made out in the Cyrillic alphabet. But partly he was not a communist for philosophical reasons; he rejected the internationalism of communist ideology and its obliteration of local difference.*

*And yet, this young man, full of literary ambition, was a little ashamed of being born nowhere. A Polish poet, from a territory that bred Polish poets – several of the greatest of them came from Lithuania, his origins gave him a certain glamour when he arrived in Warsaw, but in Paris he saw that he was nevertheless, in the eyes of the world he imagined conquering,*

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*a bumpkin and an outsider. He wanted partly a greatness, a universality, that would obliterate the awkwardness of his roots.*

*The older poet—who suffered the bitterness of achieving precisely what he wanted—well, not precisely: the author of this poem is the relatively obscure émigré professor of 1974, not the Nobel Laureate of 1980—has reflected on this matter in many poems and has identified his own ambition with the rage and impatience of the young communist revolutionaries of his generation, because part of the motivation of middle class revolutionaries, like the motivation of middle class artists, is to get even with the stupidity and venality they were born into. This theme is treated directly in a 1980 poem about revisiting the Paris of his youth. It is called "Bypassing Rue Descartes" and it reads in part:*

We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest,
  Saigon and Marakesh,
Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes,
About which nobody here should ever be told:
The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in,
Dividing food with incantations,
Choral prayers recited by master and household alike.

I had left the cloudy provinces behind,
I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.

Soon enough, many from Jassy and Koloshvar, or Saigon
  or Marakesh
Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs
  of their homes.

Soon enough, their peers were seizing power
In order to kill in the name of the beautiful, universal ideas.

*The older man, returned to a Paris busy with itself, where the symbols of national glory are a perch for pigeons, reflects on what he has learned:*

Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds,
And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead.

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There is no capital of the world anymore, neither here nor
anywhere else,
And the abolished customs are restored to their small fame
And now I know that the time of human generations is not like
the time of the earth.

As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:
How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream,
I pushed a rock down on a water snake coiled in the grass.

*In ancient Lithuania, water snakes were sacred beings, and the feeling for them survived into the poet's own time. He is confessing to the violation of one of those taboos that tie human beings to their place. Politically, there is a deep distrust here for the violence implicit in any universalizing rationality like Marxism, as there is, throughout the poem, a distrust of rabid nationalism. What sits between them is a belief in sacred locality and the toleration of difference, in something like the political vision of the old Polish-Lithuanian Respublica.*

*"Lauda," then, is partly a confession and a making of amends. That is why, at the beginning, its author, prepared to speak like some heavenly version of an old Lithuanian squire with a fly-swatter for a sceptre, admits that "all shame" has forsaken him. He is a Miłosz, from a little river valley where the name of his maternal grandmother—in Polish Syruć, in Lithuanian Syrutis—can be traced back to a will dated 1595 and where the name of his paternal grandmother—the more clearly Polish Łopaciński—dates to 1664, and where the names of backward little places, Lauda, Wędziagoła, Opitołoki, Swiętbrośc, have not been denied, but lovingly preserved by generations of amateur historians, whom he calls up in the prose sections of the poem in all the comedy of their provincial piety, so that his own poem can join with them, as he says, "in a ritual."*

*To an American reader "Lauda" is apt to look at first like one of Jorge Luis Borges's cunning parodies of the labyrinth of scholarship, or like the mad annotations of Vladimir Nabokov's émigré lunatic Kinbote in* Pale Fire. *But it is neither of these things. The Lithuanian Encyclopedia from which it so freely quotes and the Historical Archive published in Kovno (or Kaunas) are not the author's inventions. The battles, the*

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*churches, the sacred oaks, the old priests writing dictionaries of dying languages, the wives who misplace manuscripts destined for glory, the catalogues of brass and pewter and debt and old muskets are real, if history is real. As you will see when you read further into the poem, it is the author's deepest conviction—philosophical, religious, and political—that they are absolutely real. They are what we need to mean by "real." And what we need to mean by "real" is, finally, the subject of this poem.*

*—Robert Hass*

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# Lauda

A certain eminent alchemist wrote of that country that it is to be found wherever it has been placed by the first and most important need of the human mind, the same need that called into being geometry and science, philosophy and religion, morality and art. The above-mentioned alchemist—he was an ally of Descartes—also wrote that the name of the country could be Saana or Armageddon, Patmos or Lethe, Arcadia or Parnassus.

No, there should be no space here,
Though I talk to you and you stand before me
In a sun somewhat similar,
In a night almost the same,
And even a raindrop behaves here as it does there.

This place is different.* Herald angels singing,
The three kings bowing in the street,
And lions under an arcade kneel
To announce a miracle.

And we, locked in amber, with trumpets, viols,
We run, we sing, we praise the days gone by
Because now we see them clearly, without pain.

And suddenly in my hand a sceptre,
Or a child's rattle, so that I can accompany myself,
since all shame has forsaken me,
And I can confess that I suffered after all.

Well, not exactly, not a sceptre, a whipstock.
In fact a fly-swatter, so that I sit at home
Listening by the window because a neighbor might drop in,
But it's quiet except for the creak of the well-beam.

I was born there and came from the noble class.
We were better than the yeomen of Lauda or Wędziagoła.

* "This place is different . . ." This stanza evokes a traditional Polish Christmas carol, which we have tried to suggest.

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I was baptized, I renounced the Devil
In the parish of Opitołoki, district of Kiejdany.

My calling is to swat flies and meditate,
Or to order Jurkszys to prepare the phaeton
So I can go gadding through Girele Forest
To pay my respects to my kinsmen, the Silvestrowiczes,
Also the Dowgirds or the Dowgiełłos.

To be moderately happy. Our country is quiet,
Though not very rich. Few people use a coach.
It costs too much, it takes four horses,
So it always sits there in the carriage house.

To hunt after first snow. The first star will appear soon,
I stamped snow off my boots in the entrance hall,
The table is set for Christmas Eve and the cakes are soaked
in honey,
My dear Hedvig knows just how to please me.

If I hadn't been sent off to school in Wilno,
What would have been gained? Nothing.
I wouldn't anyway have been put to rest in Swiętobrość,
In Šventybrastis, at the Holy Ford,
Where my ancestors are buried
And where the little boy was always startled by the horses' habit
Of stopping for a drink in midstream.

Now I feel as if I had flung a stone
From the Golden Gate Bridge, from which a suicide
Flies as in his dream, smaller than a gull.
As if I woke from an afternoon nap
And found myself in a smock of gold brocade.

It was written in the secret code of the genes.
Or I, a nobleman, played chess on the banks of the Niewiaża
With a devil insufficiently baptized, a plenipotentiary
Of telluric powers not well known.

I cannot swear that this happened to me precisely in either the nineteenth or the twentieth century because it is not certain,

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and besides of no importance. In that country things that happened yesterday or four hundred years ago don't differ very much. The place is something else, requiring more not less concreteness, and recalling it I try to eschew invention. Even if I were gathering images of the earth from many countries on two continents, my imagination could only cope with them by assigning them to positions to the south, north, east, or west of the trees and hills of one district. In my district and the neighboring one of Kovno, every little river, every town and settlement had its own dignity and was treated with respect by historians. Thanks to them, I am able to record the following notes.

*Lauda*: The word does not come from the medieval Italian song of praise, *lauda*, to which my title perhaps alludes; nor does it have to do with the laws of the Polish Diet, called in the plural *lauda*. This Lauda is the Lithuanian Liauda and is not related to the Latin *laudare*. The small river Liaudė flows through it and feeds the river Niewiaża on its way to receiving five tributaries: the Nekelpa, the Garduva, the Kemsrotas, the Nykis, and the Viešnanta. As to the settlements of Lauda, one might invoke *The Deluge* of the novelist Sienkiewicz, but a literary fiction has dubious value as an historical source. The *Lietuviu Enciklopedija*, a monumental work in thirty volumes (Boston, 1953–63) says this: "Liauda. The name of a group of villages on the right bank of the Niewiaża, mainly on the line of the Počiuneliai-Dotnuva, district of Kedainiai. About the gentry of Liauda much can be learned from the late sixteenth century court records of the Rosienie region; these consist mostly of deeds of sale and other documents. At that time a large belt on the right bank of the Niewiaża, inhabited by yeomen farmers belonging to the broad estate of Veliuona, was called Liauda."

This estimable work continues: "The name derived originally from the little river Liaudė. The manor of Liauda and its fields are situated by A. Salys close to the church in Pociuneliai (west of Krakenava). It is possible that there were other manors of Liauda. The origin of these gentry villages has been explained in many ways. Closest to the historical truth seems to be H.

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Łowmiański, who advanced the thesis that the petty gentry of these communities had been settled there by the Grand Duke of Lithuania as early as the fourteenth century and were at constant war with the Teutonic Knights. They were responsible for the defense and supply of castles along the river Niemen. At a time when Teutonic Knights continually ravaged settlements on the right bank of the Niemen up to Veliuona, Liauda and the gentry from the region of Dotnuva provided the castles with fighting men. Until the eighteenth century these gentry villages were divided into separate areas, each with several farms, belonging to the estate of Veliuona."

"The nobles better than Lauda"—it was an actual title—refers to those nobility whose social position was higher than that of the yeomen farmers who composed the village gentry, but lower than that of the aristocracy and half-aristocracy. Perhaps that is not quite accurate, since gentry farms were of unequal size; besides when the name was used in its older, larger meaning, all those who lived there could be ranked as Lauda. My mother was born where her mother was, and where I was also to be born at the manor of Szetejnie or Šeteiniai, on the left bank of the Niewiaża three kilometers from Swiętobrość or Šventybrastis, close to Lauda. My mother was the daughter of Zygmunt Kunat (which name was also spelled with two "*t*'s" as was the name of a man who figured in the *Lietuvių Encyklopedija*, Stanslaw Kunatt, an émigré and economist, Professor at the Ecole de Batignolles in Paris) and of Józefa Syruć. Whether the document quoted below from 1595, published in *Istorijos Archyvas*, v. 1, collected by K. Jablonskis, Kaunas, 1934, refers to my ancestors is impossible to ascertain for sure, but it is probable to the extent that the name Syrutis, though found among the peasants in modern times, did not exist among the nobility of that district, or probably anywhere else; in any case, the document would support placing the family in Lauda. It is written in the Cyrillic alphabet:

> I, Sebastyn Yurevich Volotkevich, countie bailiff of the Samogitian Lande, Veliuona countie, prove by this my receipt that I, in the present yere a thousand fyve hunderth

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ninetie five, thirtie day of January, was summoned in the cause of Lady Barbara Syrut, daughter of Wojciech Kovsha, widow of Jan Venclavovich Sirut, who is landed in the Samogitian Lande, to her desmesne, her manour scituated in the Samogitian Lande, Veliuona Countie, called Lauda, which saied Lady before mee bailiff and two wytnessing knights gayve and graunted and bequethed that manour of Lauda with all meases, feldes, medowes, pastures, woodes, graungies, waters, tithes, profettes, domestics, labourers, and tenants, by her last will, to her son Adam Janovich Sirut, landed squire in the Samogitian Lande, which saied Sir Adam Sirut, before mee bailiff and wytnesses took possession of the saied manour, demesne and its people and was intromitted by mee, and by the dissposition of Lady Sirut, having written down all dependants and domestics in this myne receipt, considering it as a valid register and inventorie, hereby I enumerate: (a register follows)

*Wędziagoła*: Lithuanian, *Vandžiogala*. A town south of Kiejdany in the district of Kovno, 25 km. from Kovno, 12 km from Bobty, 11 km from Ł̀abunava. The name also signified the second—after Lauda—cluster of gentry farms and manors. As to the history of the town of Wędziagoła, we read in the *Lietuvių Enciklopedija*: "Vandajagel, Wèndjagel, Vendigalin. In the second half of the fourteenth century, a large line of defense ran west from V. through Bobtai, Ariogala, and Batakiai, which protected the more densely populated middle of the country from attacks by the Teutonic Knights. On a small section of the line, 8 km. in length, between V. and Labunava, there were barricades of fallen trees in twelve places. In the year 1382 or 1384, M. Schulzbach, a Teutonic Knight, second in command at Ragaina, entered Lithuania to help Vytautas against Skirgaila, and encountered there a crowd of people who had gathered to celebrate a feast. He was forced by them into armed encounter and a battle. 120 Lithuanians were killed in the fighting in that holy place, 300 were taken prisoner and forced to the other side of the Niemen.

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"In the growing settlement in 1664, Jan and Mariona (née Łopaciński) Rostowski (or Rostworowski) erected a wooden church invoking the name of the Holy Trinity."

We read also that in 1863 the vicar of Wędziagoła, Father Antoni Kozłowski was arrested and sent to Siberia. Also we find the following information: "The manor in V., which belonged once to Chłopicki, was purchased by Hartowski in 1890. In 1918 the Polonized inhabitants of V. and the region tried to proclaim an independent republic, the 'Republic of Wędziagoła.'"

My father was born in Serbiny near Wędziagoła, the son of Artur Miłosz and Stanisława née Lopaciński. My mother's sister married Zdzisław Jurewicz (or Juriewicz, creating many difficulties considering that *ie* in Lithuanian reads *ia*) from near Bobty. Which I mention in view of the same names repeating themselves in records of the region.

*Opitołoki*: Usually thus in the old documents. Lithuanian, *Apýtalaukis*. A church and a manor 5 km. north of Kiejdany on the left bank of the Niewiaża. In the *Lietuvių Enciklopedija* we find the following description: "On the slope of a hill a small church with one tower in the baroque style, erected by the bailiff of Ariogala and magistrate of Samogitia, Piotra Szukszta, in 1635, and a few buildings, and, half a mile from the river, a palace in the park. The palace was built in the middle of the nineteenth century in the classical style in the shape of a flattened letter H with Corinthian and Ionic columns and three reliefs. In the framing of the windows there are renaissance and baroque elements. Inside attention should be paid to elegant stoves and gypsum rosettes. In the vestibule, as late as the time of the Second World War, there was furniture (a big table, chairs, a cupboard, coat racks, and so on) made from the horns of game animals. They were bought by the manor's owner in Paris during the World Exhibition for 5000 rubles. Part of the furniture is in the museum in Kiejdany. After the Second World War the palace was converted into a home for veterans. In 1802 a school was established in the manor. O. is mentioned as early as 1371 in the chronicle of Livonia. Later, it was owned by Piotra Szukszta who endowed the church built by him with ninety acres of land.

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Next Kazimierz Zawisza founded an altar and a crypt for his family. O. also belonged to the Karps, the Tyszkiewiczes, and from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the Zabiellos, who abandoned the center of the palace and allowed the park to grow wild until 1940.

My certificate of baptism, written in Russian, came from Opitoloki. I've never been in the palace. Piotr Szukszta, probably the same magistrate of Samogitia, made an inventory of his moveable possessions, which I give here, following the *Istorijos Archyvas* of 1934, so that this year and the year 1587 may be placed on an equal footing:

> The inventorie of moveables and household stuffe being in the Opitoloki house and those wch are to be taken with mee to Warsaw, the yere thousande fyve hundert eightie seven, the seventh day of June:
>
> Surcote of brown linen clothe lyned with marten; surcote of shymmeringe colour lyned with fox; surcote black with napp lyninge; surcote of grene clothe. Zhupan grey damskeene, zhupan of quilte; zhupan of browne linen clothe; zhupan of cherrie linen clothe. Doublet of red clothe; doublet of grene clothe.
>
> Spones twelfe, in them fyve thalers less sixpence; spones six, in them two thalers; cuppes four, in them four thalers; baskot for aquavit sixteen pennies. Sabre of Lady Bieniasz, twentie pence.
>
> Pewter: big bowles three, smaller bowles ten, platters eleven, disshes two, plates two dozen, ageyn plates nine, basone for washinge hands one, boxe for butter one, jugs big and smalle six, quart pots four, big bottel, medium bottel, halve bottels four, saltseller one, candell sticks two.
>
> Brasse: bowles three, jugs two, bottel one, kettle to pour water, brasse candell sticks seven, latten candell sticks two; brewing kyfe, the second in Orwistów; medium kyfe, the second in Oristów; smaller kyfe, the second in Orwistów; three legged cawdrons two; big panne one, smaller pannes two, skyllets two; gallon potts with bulges six.
>
> Big iron chaynes two; chayne in kitchen.

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Armours four, cuirasses four, couters four, helmets four, sabres newe two, broad swoords newe two, the third old, harquebuses newe two, the third old, bird musket of Sir Gineyt, simple muskets three, spear one, buckler one.

Hussard saddles two, Tartar saddle one, harnesses three, carte rope newe one, horse collars three. Coach newe hoopt, chariot hoopt, coach old hoopt, wagon bare unhoopt. Turkish head stalls two.

Horses: grey amblynge stallion; grey amblyng old; cart horses blacke two, other cart horses—horse from Luszczyk, Orwistów colt, mare, young fallow stallion, mare, baye little horse.

To Sir Stecki hundert fiftie threescores; to Sir Szembel twentie threescores for four cuppes; to Miss Regina twentie threescores; to Sir Tomas seven threescores for silver gilt belt; with Sir Bobrownicki fifteen threescores; with Sir Peliuc eightie threescores; with Sir Wojciech my brother four threescores. With Sir Borysowicz nine threescores; with Sir Mikolaj Koncza six threescores.

Chaste with letters, seeled, in which letters of Opitołoki and Orwistów of Sir my brother seeled, together the Medingiany priviledge on parchment and other small old letters with Sir my brother.

Rye on feldes of Opitołoki and Orwistów well sowne, likewise spring rye, out of which God willinge the next yere debts may be paied.

Chatteyl in Opitołoki: Yoke oxen, eight, to Paul for plowinge one, to Michael in Orwistów one. Cows twelfe, ageyn young. Ewes old twentie, lambs fourteen.

Chatteyl in Orwistów: Yoke oxen eight; with homager Thomas two: of which one ox must be geeven heem next yere for plowinge. Cows and hecfordes seventeen. Ewes and rams fortie and seven. Ageyn young, calves one yere old and of this yere.

Othere small thinges, togeather with not recorded additions to the recorded. This inventorie written with my hand writinge and sealed with my seal I leave.

(In Old Byelorussian): On that inventory one seal is

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affixed and a signature of hand in these words: Piotr Szukszta with his hand.

*Swiętobrość*: The word *brasta* means "ford." Lithuanian *Šventybrastis*. A church and a few houses on the left bank of the Niemen, on the same road that leads through Opitołoki but farther north, 15 km. from Kiejdany, but within the Kiejdany district. From the *Lietuvių Enciklopedija*: "Though localities in the neighborhood of S., like Kalnaberže, Šlapaberže, and Dotnuva, were known to the Teutonic Knights and attacked on their raids into Lithuania, the chronicles do not mention S. According to legend, S. was once a pagan holy place. At the beginning of the Second World War, five fine oaks, up to 37 m. high, with a circumference of 3.5–5.8 m., were still standing. The name S. was likely derived from the Lithuanian *šventas*, Polish *święty*, which means "holy," and from the little river ford by which it is situated. The first wooden church of Our Lord's Transfiguration was built in 1774 by the owner of the manor Zawiszyn, Ignacy Zawisza. In 1880 Janowski enlarged it, adding a wing and a belfry. In 1915 two huge bells were taken from the belfry and carried to Russia. In 1863 in the neighborhood of S., near the village of Daniliškiai, the Russians fought a battle with detachments of insurrectionaries. In the battle, 25 insurgents were killed, eleven wounded, and eight taken prisoner. On the twentieth of October 1863, Father A. Mackiewicz, commanding a detachment of the insurrectionaries, attacked the Russians in this place, and seized twenty poods of gunpowder and other weaponry. Near the church of S., by the river Niewiaża and the little river Brasta, there are graves of fallen insurgents. To commemorate them, a wooden cross was raised, and replaced by a concrete monument in 1938. In 1928 the church was renovated. S. is a branch of the Apýtalaukis parish."

Passing it every day on a street from which you can glimpse the Pacific through San Francisco Bay, I dropped into the Museum of Modern Art to have a look at an exhibition of the projected cities of the future. These were models of buildings, every one of which would hold a million inhabitants. So I cannot expect a Temple of Sybil to survive in which my right shoe will

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be preserved and the loss of my left shoe a reason for lament. But we should not discount the curiosity of computers, a company of which will reflect on everything—among other obscurities, my origin and descent, and they will have to tackle the knotty problem of what country I should be assigned to. Considering certain features of their analytic program, their difficulties are easy to foresee—because the historical Samogitia stretched from the Baltic Sea to the river Niewiaża. Across the river on the eastern, that is to say, the left bank, another region called Aukštota began, and I was born on the left bank. Consider, however, my ties with Lauda, which was dependent on the castle at Veliuonia; consider the undoubted fact that Wedziagoła is the historical Samogitia, and also the fact that Piotr Szukszta from Opitołoki (the wrong side of the river) was a Samogitian magistrate; above all though, a sensible computer would not neglect climate and landscape (indications of how these data are to be assimilated will not be given here), which alone allow us to decide whether one comes from Samogitia or Aukštota.

In Wilno, the state high school for boys, called King-Sigmunt August's, on Bouffałowa Street (on the corner of Mała Pohulanka Street), had as chairman of its matriculation committee in 1929 a Professor Marian Massonius from Stefan Batory University, an old man, bald, with a long beard, about whom *The Philosophy of Poland: A Dictionary of Writers*, Warsaw, 1971, records the following: "In reference to Polish philosophy, Massonius maintained that the Polish mind has a basically empirical tendency and is inclined to inductive thinking and 'quite unfriendly to a speculative or fantastic style of thought.' He considered the positivist tendency as typical of Polish philosophy; Polish metaphysics, according to him, was shaped by the more romantic Lithuanian influences."

And now we are joined in a ritual.
In amber? In crystal? We make music.
Neither what once was nor what ever will be.
Only what persists when the world is over.

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## Lenten Song

Now my hands are gone to sleep.
A drowsy tingling takes my feet.
Sight and hearing lie no more.
Smell and taste lose their allure.
There is neither near nor far.
Everything is great and small.

I ran a long time on the earth
And shouldered through a fiery gulf.
I judged others, judged their worth,
Knowing nothing of myself.
That a meaning would not flare
In the long and wakeful night
Gave me grief, and then despair,
But the words would yield no light.

Mirrors, shadows on a screen,
All I'd thought and all I'd seen.
My face perhaps was honest clay.
Even now it fades away.
The light shuddered and went out,
Leaving self-love in the dark.

## Overseas Song

In one of the more obscure African tongues
I fashioned my verses.
Even the *Commedia* is merely comic
Once its tribe disperses.

Whisked to the shores of motley continents
Among dragon scales of the sea
I saw myself from far away and above
As an island or a tree.

What had to be has been, although not quite.
The Wilno student hoped for grander deeds.

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From him who earned little, it will be taken.
Minor triumphs, forgettable defeats.

My betters also tried to tune their voices.
Their names are entangled in grass.
I alone remain, filtering order from chaos,
For my mind was clear and perverse.

Above me every day the late Empire's eagles,
The planet perishing, provinces on fire.
Let the poor devils in that molten glare
Make sense of the elemental riot.

Who can blame me for seeking a native land
Here or perhaps nowhere,
Mixing dialects and provincial idioms
With an oceanic choir?

This transparent amber in my palm—
We are in it, with a fiddle's quaver,
And a song and guests stately in their dance
Will gladden us forever.

It's time, since we have meditated long enough, to give our assessment of a character who appears here, an assessment made without particular sympathy but without prejudice. We do not intend to make a clinical report; that is not, of course, possible. It is possible, nevertheless, to hope that impartiality will guide us.

He was a young man, quite able to learn, but without talent.
Others were talented, his friend the poet Theodore, for example,
Who much later moved to the same apartment house at 5 Podgórna Street,
Where our subject had been growing crookedly in an ugly apartment,
With rubber plants and there Theodore took three bullets in the stomach
At close range, because of which he was spared the need
To cross so many borders. He didn't grasp at a slim tree

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In the street of a great city when the houses revolved
and tumbled
On an escapee who shouts "Where am I? where am I?"
He didn't acquire a number of skills, not only superfluous
But harmful since they use up our time and our will.
Also he was spared the buffoonery of endless compromise
And of punishing himself with drunken babble.

The young man was cleverly constructed.
He was inhabited by a vulgar and lunatic ego.
He demanded love, admiration, the murmurs of praise,
Though power would only have satisfied him
If he had been invited by the tyrant of Syracuse
To use his resources to create a perfect state.
(He read *The Magic Mountain* then:
And he always took the side of Naptha, who glorified terror.)

Nevertheless, despite everything or because of it,
Inside he had nothing but fear.
Fear of others' eyes, fear of touch, fear of human morals,
Fear of life greater than fear of death,
And scornfulness and high fastidiousness.

So the young man meditated on the degeneration of families,
How the blood of obscure boyars of Samogitia was being spoiled
Until it produced a mutation of monsters and cripples,
Schizophrenic souls in stupid and gluttonous bodies.
He nursed a grudge against his father because of his defeat,
For one should not travel on the Arctic Ocean and in the Sayan
Mountains and in Brazil
Just to become a District Engineer
And to comfort oneself with vodka after a tour of muddy roads.
It was thus that the young man received inspiration,
Which is usually understood wrongly.
Neither rhythm nor incantation can supply the words.
He searched and he searched, and the years passed.

Talent is something else. Talent is exactly what Theodore had.
But talent seduces us with temporal rewards,

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And now when the grave of Theodore is eroded,
When Draugas has died by his own hand in Canada,
And Nika is an old woman and will die in Australia,
Theodore will be remembered because of one poem.
Dictated—because it is not the skill of the hand
That writes poetry, but water, trees,
And the sky which is dear to us even though it's dark,
And parents and parents of those parents since time immemorial.
And here we set down this poem, as though it bore an inscription:
"The last poor bard of the Grand Duchee."

* * *

*LITHUANIA, my native land. Simply and fervently*
*I repeat the words of our prayer.*
*Land of unfertile earth, of cornflowers and thistles,*
*Of white churches on flattened shores,*
*Of large mists and a sad sky,*
*Of lakes rustling with reeds.*

*LITHUANIA. With bitter lips,*
*Lacking in hope or faith,*
*I murmur and invoke your name,*
*And deep wind rocks the poplars*
*And rattles the leaves of leaning trees.*

*Through hungry roads leading out to the fallows,*
*By houses thrown into a coffin of rotting walls,*
*The cattle return home in the evening*
*And a huge sun like a red jar pours*
*Live blood on the thick clouds.*

*LITHUANIA. Land of persistent bad weather,*
*Torn by winds as the shore cliffs are,*
*Damaged by centuries and gods,*
*Draw swords from the sky's white sheaths,*

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*Pour down hail, let it strike in abundance,*
*Give us pathos and put fire in our mouths!*

*Silence!*

—Theodore Bujnicki*

*Bibliography of Polish Literature, The New Korbut* in its eighteenth volume gives the following biographical note under the heading, Jucewicz Ludwik Adam: "Pseud. and crypt.: L.A.J.; L. from Pok . . .; Ludwik from Pokiewia. Poet, ethnographer. Born 1810 in Pokiewie in Samogitia. Theological studies in seminary at Wilno. Became a priest in 1837 and obtained a vicarage at Świadość. Around 1839 broke with Catholicism, switched to Orthodoxy, and married. In 1841 edited an annual called Linksminė (which means rainbow). In 1844 became a teacher at the district school of Lepel. Died there in 1846."

Father Jucewicz is considered one of the first Lithuanian ethnographers. He collected songs, proverbs, and folk legends. He wrote in Polish, but also translated Mickiewicz and other poets into Lithuanian. The manor of Pokiewie where he was born was situated in the district of Szawle. The note does not permit us to guess the reason for his switching to Orthodoxy, nor the responsibility of music in it. The vicar of Świadość was perhaps unaware that the shared reading of poetry by people of different sexes or moments spent together at the clavichord have detrimental consequences, as is demonstrated by Paolo and Francesca in Dante's Hell and also by Gustav in *Forefather's Eve.**

* Teodor Bujnicki (1907–1944) was, with the author, one of the founders of the *Żagary* or Catastrophist school of poets in Wilno in the 1930s. He became a supporter of the Soviet authorities when they occupied Wilno in 1940 and was killed by young men from an underground resistance organization.

* *Forefather's Eve* (1832) is a verse play by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), who is usually regarded as the greatest of Polish poets. He was born in Lithuania and attended the university at Wilno. His *Pan Tadeusz*, a long verse narrative about the Polish-Lithuanian gentry, is probably the single most important work in Polish literature. *Forefather's Eve*, written during

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Thus he would often go to his nearby neighbors, the landowners Żurawskis, and fell fatally in love with their daughter Malwina.

I was already familiar with some of the writings of Father Jucewicz in childhood. His *Lithuania Described As To Its Old Monuments, Mores, and Customs*, published by Ludwik of Pokiewia, Wilno, 1846, contains in its introduction an encomium to the Lithuanian language, expresses regret that foreign (i.e., Polish) customs and a foreign tongue have been adopted, and enumerates briefly "the more important works which have appeared in public in the Lithuanian language," beginning with Protestant tracts and Jakób Wujek's *Postylla* (Sermons), the translation of which by Father Nicholas Dauksza, dedicated to the Bishop of Samogitia, Prince Melchior Giedrojc, was printed at the press of the Jesuit Academy in 1599. The author also says: "The second person to provide so great a service to native literature is Father Konstanty Szyrwid, Jesuit, eminent Lithuanian philologist and preacher. The style of his sermons is correct, his language is always pure and free from foreign borrowings." For "not only among Protestants were there zealous proponents of the Christian faith and friends of village folk. Not long ago, in our Roman Church, there was a great man of noble lineage, a descendent of Lithuanian monarchs, a man who, serving the altar, reached a venerable age in his vocation, in his saintliness, in (if I am permitted to use an expression of one of the great Polish writers) his very eyes, and in the silver-white hair that adorned his patriarchal brow and descended to his shoulders, priest most deserving of respect, shepherd to the Samogitian flock, Józef Arnólf Prince Giedrojc! To him we owe a translation of the New Testament into our native tongue."

The author also pays homage to Donelajtis, the author of a poem called *Four Seasons*, and praises the Lithuanian poetry of his own era: Szymon Staniewicz, Dyonizy Paszkiewicz, and the clergyman Antoni Drozdowski, and he proclaims the following: "There have not been until now any historical works

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the Russian occupation of Poland, contains many bitter references to that country, and productions of it have been banned by Polish communist authorities as recently as 1968.

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in Lithuanian. I have only heard that Jerzy Hr. Plater wrote a history of Lithuania in the national language, but because of the premature death of that young lover of things of the fatherland, it hasn't yet appeared in print. We nourish the hope (be it not deceived!) that the honorable spouse of the dead man won't hide the manuscript and will publish it as soon as possible. It will be one of the most beautiful flowers of our literature, a wreath which will hang in the temple of memory and fame!"

The spouse didn't hang the wreath, because, we may suppose, she was numbered among the indifferent to whom Father Jucewicz addressed the following appeal:

"But for the misfortune that few people understand our language and even fewer can speak it, we could yet rid ourselves of that prejudice which we have against our national speech. Even Lithuanian poets of today, alas, write not in Lithuanian! It is time to rid ourselves of these inveterate habits! It is time to return to our senses and to blend knowledge of foreign language with knowledge of the one spoken by our great-grandfathers—*because language is the property of a nation, and no one should forget the speech of his ancestors*!"

I arrive, Father Ludwik, a woodpecker knocking in the pines.
After years of sound and fury, a colt stirred in the stable.
You see, I have lost the habit of candlesticks with sconces.
No one among the bards returned to the speech of his ancestors.
Whoever forgot its sound forgot it forever.
And there were many others later, various names you don't know.
Mr. Norwid, for instance, and Mr. Gombrowicz, both from Samogitia.*
We are not Lithuanian poets, neither myself nor the Lithuanian Theodore.
Only in far-off cities, over a Greek or a Sanskrit dictionary,
Did I rub my brow, as if I were sure I had heard that word
By the river at harvest time, in a graveyard on All Souls' Day.
I lived a long life there, several times a hundred years.

* "Mr. Norwid" and "Mr. Gombrowicz" are Cyprian Norwid (1821–83) and Witold Gombrowicz (1909–69), both distinguished Polish writers.

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On my conscience the fate of serfs and servants.
Who except me has pondered the life of Jasiulis
And his wife, and their son Gregory, and their four daughters,
And Matulis, Pranialis, Ambrożej, and their sisters Polonija,
Rajna, Dosjuda, and Bujkis? And Mik Żemojitiewicz
And his wife Kasiula, and Ławryn and Miłoszajtis?
Who sifts in his hand their ashes, changed now into words?
And this is not, Father Ludwik, some false humility.
It was, let me make a comparison, like tearing apart a cloud.
For human ways deceive us with their warmth and bubbling noises.
The truth of the earth is not that. We know it in flesh and blood.
Having the memory of many lives, I was not as defenseless as others.
I was able to choose what was small because the great passes in just the same way.
Let me put my books there where your proverbs are,
On shelves smelling of ginger, by the Lithuanian statutes.

Ludwik Adam Jucewicz calls Dyonizy Paszkiewicz, who signed his poems Dyonizas Poszka, "the most zealous worker for national glory." He was a Samogitian nobleman and he founded a museum of native artifacts in the interior of an immense oak called Baublis which grew on his estate at Bordzie.

*Is great Baublis still alive, whose heart,*
*Dug out by centuries, could hold a cart*
*Or twelve good people for a wedding feast?*

The bard Mickiewicz* asked, though he must have known that Baublis had withered from old age and was cut down in 1811.

Father Ludwik had a good opinion of Poszka's epigrams, and quotes one of them, "heard myself from the mouth of the poet."

"The subject was provided by the following event: neighbors were driving Paszkiewicz at carnival time; a carriage that had been driven ahead had had an accident, rolling over, and a lady sitting in it lost a bag containing a beloved golden snuff box.

* "The bard Mickiewicz": see the note to p. 126.

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An officer named Linde who was following on horseback had failed to notice it and smashed it to bits. Upon the arrival of the Lithuanian bard, the lady told him with great pathos the whole tragic story of her snuff box. Paszkiewicz responded: If you so much regret your snuff box, put in the place where it ended its existence a monument, and on it this little poem which I will provide to you:

*Cze buwa tabakiera,*
*O dabarczios niera.*
*Nes tas Linde passiutis,*
*Prawaziavo nepajutis.*

The Lithuanian orthography is not perfect and the contents not very sophisticated. It means more or less this: Here there was a snuff box, and now it is not, because that crazy Linde smashed it without noticing.

*By the Great Kowno Highway.* Where seals bark in the clouds
And sailboats glide through the gate of sheer rock, coming from the sea.
*In this temporal place of our pilgrimage,*
*Neither by human persuasion nor enforcement nor instigation,*
*Knowinge that nothinge is more certyn in the world than death,*
*I bequethe for future times and graunte for human needs*
*Myne demeasne with all wilderness belonging to the estate,*
*With forests, woodes, lakes,* with buried ribbons of pretty ladies,
And a snuff box of pure gold, with myself as I was,
A wanderer from town to town, with everything
*I signed by my propre hand,*
*And be it so that we or our descendents leave for foreign landes,*
Let these verses be preserved, even on cheap paper,
As testimony that it's no use to kick against the pricks,
For we wanted to have this for ourselves and it turned out otherwise,
What was accepted in bitterness and misery turned into praise,
From a complaint hardly spoken there grew up thanksgiving,
*So that by our owne free choice and will we partake,*

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*Hayving heard and adored the worde of God,*
Following the example of our old and pious ancestors,
Both of Lithuania and Russ,
In our unremoveable desmesne, safe from terrestrial adventure.

*Note: In this last writing, idioms and formulas are borrowed from sixteenth century wills and bequests to Protestant churches, as well as from the privileges by which King Sigismund August granted equal rights to the Catholic and non-Catholic nobility of the Grand Duchy. According to* Monumenta Reformationis Polonicae et Lithuanicae, *printed by the Synod of the Lithuanian Evangelical-Reform Union, Wilno, 1911.*

*translated from the Polish*
*by the author and Robert Hass*

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# The Lily-White Boys

## William Maxwell

The Follansbees' Christmas party was at tea-time on Christmas Day, and it was for all ages. Ignoring the fire laws, the big Christmas tree standing between the two front windows in the living room of the Park Avenue apartment had candles on it. When the last one was lit, somebody flipped a light switch, and in the hush that fell over the room the soft yellow candlelight fell on the upturned faces of the children sitting on the floor in a ring around the base of the tree, bringing tears to the eyes of the susceptible. The tree was strung with loops of gold and silver tinsel and popcorn and colored paper, and some of the glass ornaments—the hardy tin soldier, the drum, the nutmeg, and the Man in the Moon—went all the way back to Beth Follansbee's childhood. While the presents were being distributed, Mark Follansbee stood by with a bucket of water and a broom. The room smelled of warm wax and balsam.

The big red candles on the mantlepiece burned down slowly in their nest of holly. In the dining room, presiding over the cutglass punch bowl, Beth Follansbee said, "You let the

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peaches sit all day in a quart of vodka, and then you add two bottles of white wine and a bottle of champagne. Be a little careful. It isn't as innocuous as you might think," and with her eyebrows signaled to the maid that the plate of watercress sandwiches needed refilling. Those that liked to sing had gathered around the piano in the living room and having done justice to all the familiar carols were singing with gusto, "Seven for the seven stars in the sky and six for the six proud walkers. Five for the symbols at your door and four for the Gospel makers, Three, three, the rivals, Two, two, two the lily-white boys, clothed all in green-ho. One is one and all alone and evermore shall *be* so." And an overexcited little boy with a plastic space ship was running up and down the hall and shouting "Blast off!"

The farewells at the elevator door were followed by a second round down below on the sidewalk while the doorman was blowing his whistle for cabs.

"Can we drop you?" Ellen Hunter called.

"No. You're going downtown, and it would be out of your way," Celia Coleman said.

The Colemans walked two blocks north on Park and then east. The sidewalks of Manhattan were bare, the snow the weatherman promised having failed to come. There were no stars, and the night sky had a brownish cast. From a speaker placed over the doorway of a darkened storefront human voices sang "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The drugstore on the corner was brightly lighted but locked, with the iron grating pulled down and no customers inquiring about cosmetics at the cash register or standing in front of the revolving Timex display unable to make up their minds.

The Venetian red door of the Colemans' house was level with the sidewalk and had a Christmas wreath on it. In an eerie fashion it swung open when Dan Coleman tried to fit his key in the lock.

"Did we forget to close it?" Celia said and he shook his head. The lock had been jimmied.

"I guess it's our turn," he said grimly as they walked in. At

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the foot of the stairs they stood still and listened. Nothing on the first floor was disturbed. There was even a silver spoon and a small silver tray on the dining room sideboard. Looking at each other they half managed to believe that everything was all right: the burglars had been frightened by somebody coming down the street, or a squad car perhaps, and had cleared out without taking anything. But the house felt queer, not right somehow, not the way it usually felt, and they saw why when they got to the top of the first flight of stairs.

"Sweet Jesus!" he exclaimed softly, and she thought of her jewelry.

The shades were drawn to the sills, so that people on the sidewalk or in the apartments across the way could not see in the windows. One small detail caught his eye in the midst of the general destruction. A Limoges jar that held potpourri lay in fragments on the hearth and a faint odor of rose petals hung on the air.

With her heart beating faster than usual and her mouth as dry as cotton she said, "I can understand why they might want to look behind the pictures, but why walk on them?"

"Saves time," he said.

"And why break the lamps?"

"I don't know," he said. "I have never gone in for housebreaking."

A cigarette had been placed at the edge of a table top, right next to an ashtray, and allowed to burn all the way down. The liquor cupboard was untouched. In the study, on that same floor at the back of the house, where the hi-fi, the tape deck, and the TV should have been there was a blank space. Rather than bother to unscrew the cable, the burglars had snipped it with wire cutters. All the books had been pulled from the shelves and lay in mounds on the floor.

"Evidently they are not readers," he said, and picked up volume seven of *Hakluyt's Voyages* and stood it on an empty shelf.

She tried to think of a reason for not going up the next flight

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to the bedrooms, to make the uncertainty last a little longer. Rather than leave her jewelry in the bank and never have the pleasure of wearing it, she had hidden it in a place that seemed to her very clever.

It was not clever enough. The star ruby ring, the cabuchon emeralds, the gold bracelets, the moonstones, the garnet necklace that had been her father's wedding present to her mother, the peridot and tourmaline pin that she found in an antiquity shop on a back street in Toulon, the diamond earrings—gone. All gone. Except for the things Dan had given her they were all inherited and irreplaceable, and so what would be the point of insuring them.

"In a way it's a relief," she said, in what sounded to her, though not to him, like her normal voice.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that you can't worry about possessions you no longer have."

She opened the top right-hand drawer of her dressing table and saw that the junk jewelry was still there. As she pushed the drawer shut he said, "The standard procedure," and took her in his arms.

The rest was also pretty much the standard procedure. Mattresses were pulled half off the beds and ripped open with a razor blade, drawers turned upside down, and his clothes closet completely empty, which meant that his wardrobe now consisted of the dark blue suit he had put on earlier this evening to go to the Follansbees' Christmas party. Her dresses lay in a colored confusion that spilled out into the room from the floor of her walk-in closet. Boxes from the upper shelves had been pulled down and ransacked—boxes containing hats, evening purses, evening dresses she no longer had occasion to wear, since they seldom went out at night except to go to the theater or dine with friends.

When the police came she let him do the talking. Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, were the prime moments for break-ins, they said. The house had probably been watched. They made

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a list of the more important things and suggested that Dan send them an inventory. They were pleasant and held out no hope. There were places they could watch, they said, to see if anything belonging to the Colemans turned up, but chances were that . . . When they left he put the back of a chair against the doorknob of the street door and started up the stairs.

From the stairs he could see into their bedroom. To his astonishment Celia had on an evening dress he hadn't seen for twenty years. Turning this way and that, she studied her reflection in the full-length mirror on the back of a closet door. Off the dress came, over her head, and she worked her way into a scarlet chiffon sheath that had a sooty footprint on it. Her hair had turned from dark brown to grey and when she woke up in the morning her back was as stiff as a board, but the dress fit her perfectly. While he stood there, watching, and unseen, she tried them on, one after another—the black taffeta with the bouffant skirt, the pale sea-green silk with bands of matching silk fringe, all her favorite dresses that she had been too fond of to take to a thrift shop, and that had been languishing on the top shelf of her closet. As she stepped back to consider critically the effect of a white silk evening suit, her high heels ground splinters of glass into the bedroom rug.

Its load lightened by a brief stop in the Bronx at a two-story warehouse that was filled from floor to ceiling with hi-fi sets and color TVs, the Chrysler sedan proceded along the Bruckner Elevated Expressway to Route 95. When the car slowed down for the toll-gate at the Connecticut state line, the sandy-haired recidivist, slouched down in the right-hand front seat, opened his eyes. The false license plates aroused no interest whatever as the car came to a stop and then drove on.

In the middle of the night, the material witnesses to the breaking and entering communicated with one another, a remark at a time. A small spotlight up near the ceiling that was trained on an area over the living room sofa said, *When I saw*

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*the pictures being ripped from the walls I was afraid. I thought I was going to go the same way.*

*So fortunate, they were*, the red stair-carpet said, and the stair-rail said, *Fortunate? How?*

*The intruders were gone when they came home.*

*I had a good look at them*, said the mirror over the lowboy in the downstairs hall. *They were not at all like the Colemans' friends or the delivery boys from Gristede's and the fish market.*

*The Colemans' friends don't break in the front door*, the Sheraton sideboard said. *They ring and then wait for somebody to come and open it.*

*She will have my top refinished*, said the table with the cigarette scar. *The number is in the telephone turnaround. She knows about that sort of thing and he doesn't. But it will take a while. And the room will look odd without me.*

*It took a long time to make that star ruby*, said a small seashell on the mantelpiece.

*Precious stones you can buy*, said the classified directory. *Van Cleef and Arpels. Harry Winston. And auctions at Christie's and Sotheby Parke-Bernet. It is the Victorian and Edwardian settings that were unusual. I don't suppose the thieves will know enough to value them.*

*They will be melted down*, said the brass fire irons, *into unidentifiability. It happens every day.*

*Antique jewelry too can be picked up at auction places. Still, it is disagreeable to lose things that have come down in the family. It isn't something one would choose to have happen.*

*There are lots of things one would not choose to have happen that do happen*, said the fire irons.

*With any unpleasantness*, said the orange plastic Design Research kitchen wall clock, *it is better to take the long view.*

*Very sensible of them to fall asleep the minute their heads hit the pillow*, said the full-length mirror in the master bedroom. *Instead of turning and tossing and going over in their minds the things they have lost, that are gone forever.*

*They have each other*, a small bottle of Elizabeth Arden per-

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fume spray said. *They will forget about what happened this evening. Or, if they remember, it will be something they have ceased to have much feeling about, a story they tell sometimes at dinner parties, when the subject of robberies comes up. He will tell how they walked home from the Follansbees' on Christmas night and found the front door ajar, and she will tell about the spoon and the silver tray the thieves didn't take, and he will tell how he stood on the stairs watching while she tried on all her favorite evening dresses.*

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*Portfolio*

# Drawings

## Alice Neel

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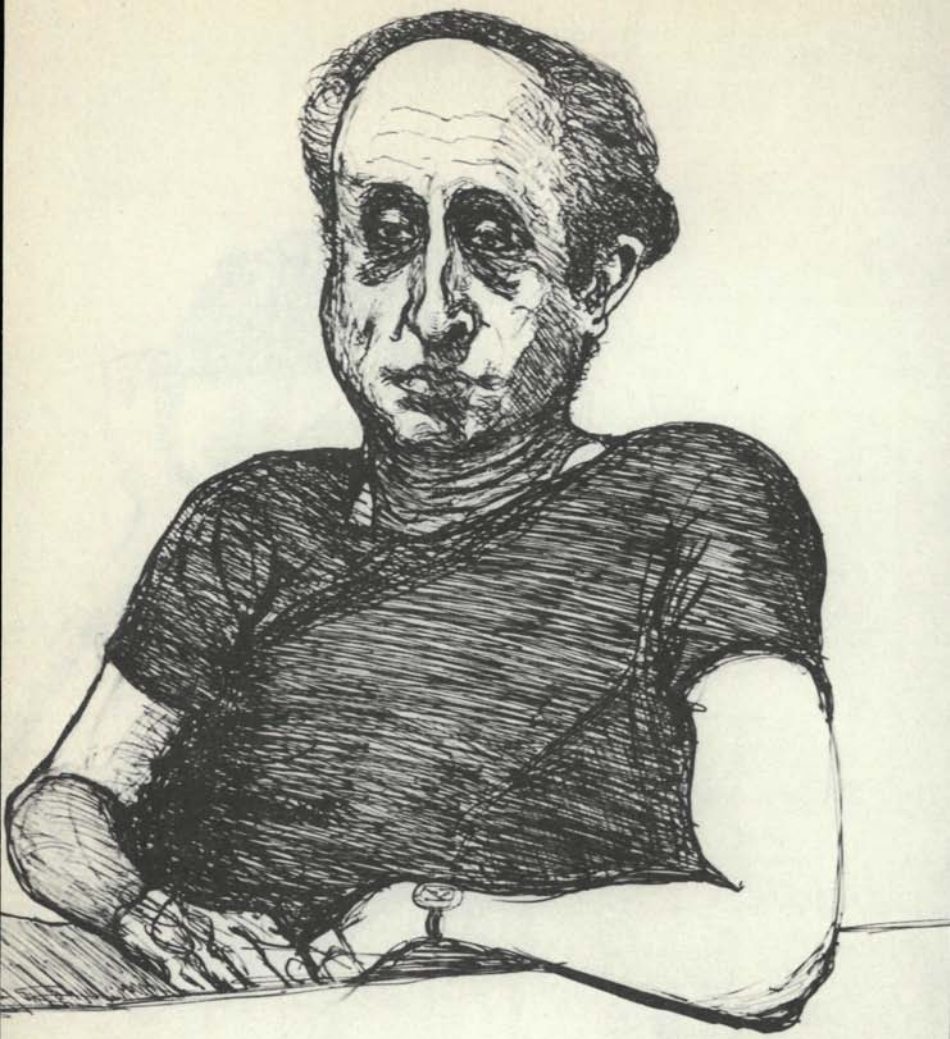

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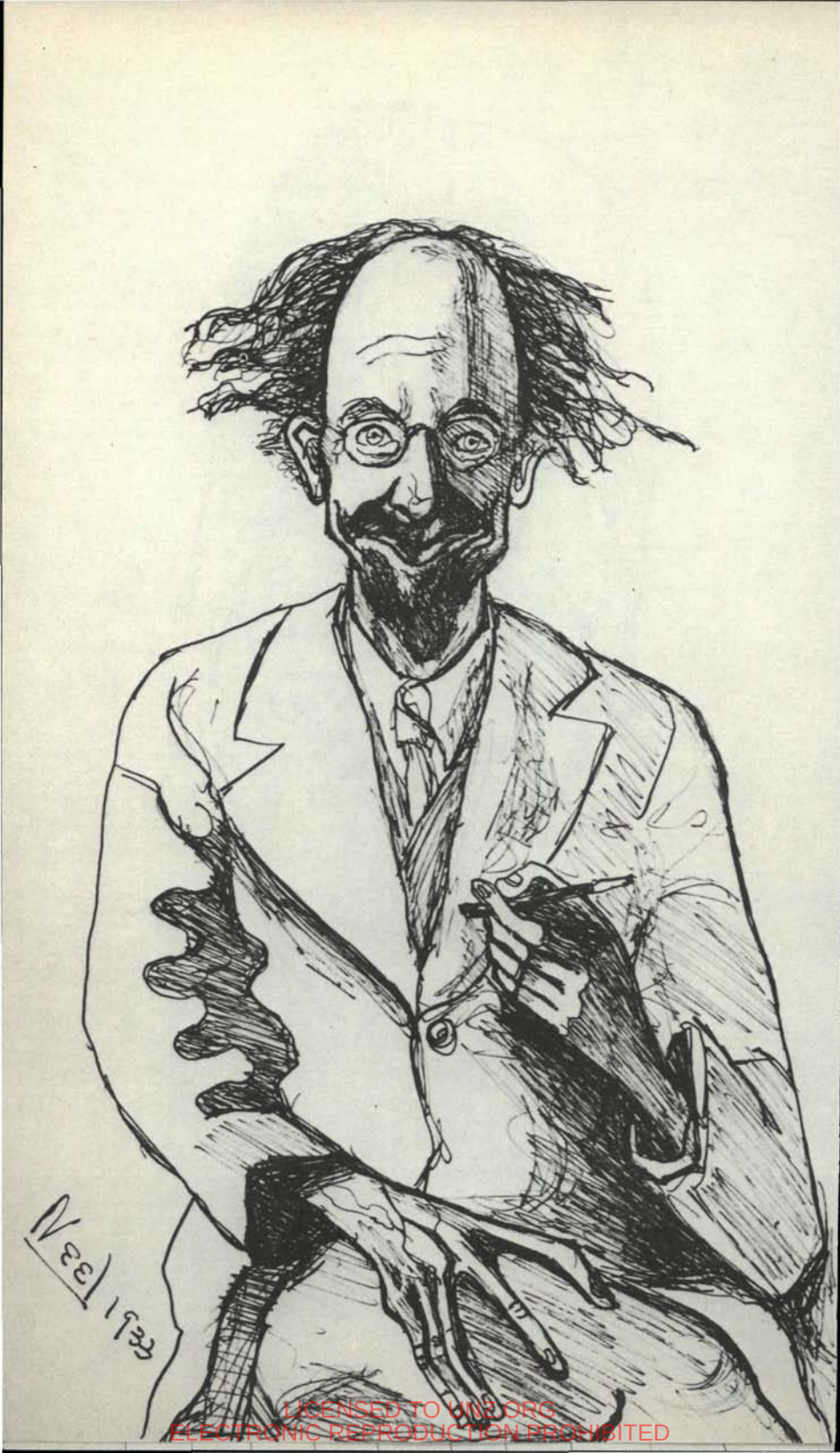

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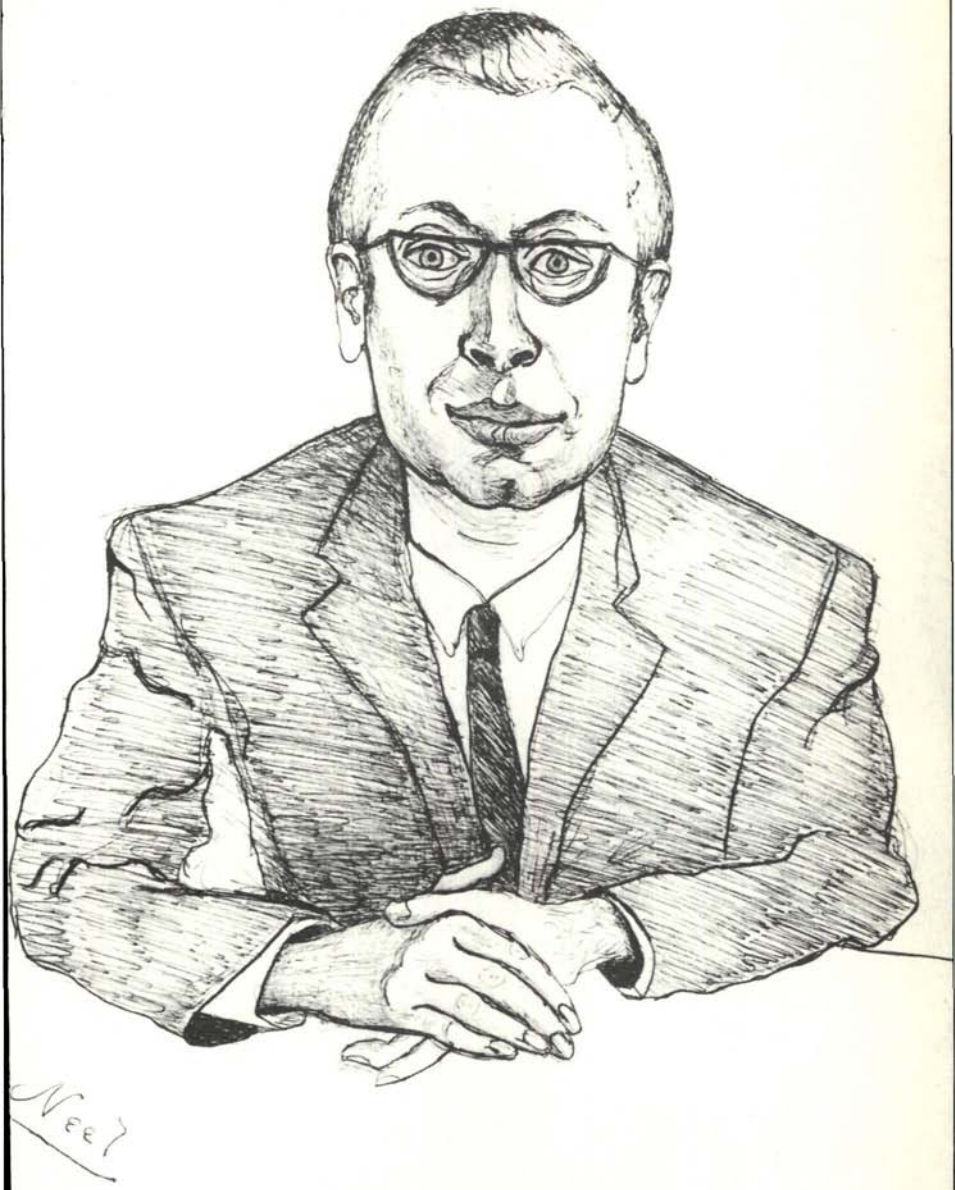

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*Carlos Drummond de Andrade*

## Song for That Man of the People Charlie Chaplin

I

It had to be some poet from Brazil
not one of the greatest, more likely to make a fool of himself
shuffling around somewhere in your vicinity or aspiring to dwell there
as in the domain, poetic and essential, of lucid dreams

it had to be this obstinate little minstrel
of elementary rhythms, fresh from a small town in the interior
where they don't insist on your wearing a tie but everyone's extremely polished
and oppression is abhorred even though heroism's suffused with a certain irony

it had to be some long-ago boy of twenty
drawn to your pantomime by threads of tenderness and laughter, broken in time,
who would finally venture back, much older now, and pay you a visit
to say a few things to you under pretext of a poem.

To tell you how we Brazilians have loved you
and that in this, as in everything else, our people are similar
to any other in the world—including the small Jews
with walking stick and derby hat, pointy shoes, melancholy eyes

vagabonds whom the world has expelled, and yet they go on living and clowning
in film, along those crooked streets with signboards: Factory, Barber, Police,

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foiling hunger, dodging brutality, perpetuating love
like a secret whispered into the ear of a common man fallen in the street.

I know that no speech, however lullingly bourgeois, is going to affect you
that you habitually sleep through the vehement inauguration of statues,
that out of so many words surging like traffic through the busy streets
only the humblest, a curse or a kiss, can touch you.

It's no greeting of devotees I offer you, of ardent fans
who don't exist, but one from ordinary people in an ordinary town
and I've no pretenses now concerning the substance of this song about you
like some airmailed bouquet of absurd flowers addressed to the inventor of gardens.

Through me would speak those forever reviled for their unhappiness and wildly disgusted with it all
who filed into the theaters like an affliction of rats fleeing life
for the sake of two hours of anesthesia —to hear the music on the piano or
commune with images in the darkness— and suddenly they discovered you, and were saved.

Through me would speak those forsaken by justice, losers and pariahs
bankrupt, mutilated, deficient, solitary, repressed
dreamy, indecisive, tender, hopelessly sentimental
irresponsibly childish, simple of heart, insane, pathetic.

And through me, the flowers you loved so much once stepped upon
through me, the stumps of candles you ate in your quintessential poverty
instruments of your trade, the thousand and one things apparently stuck

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each gadget, each object out of the attic,
the more obscure they were
the more they would speak.

II

Your clothes are suffused with night.
Your dappled vest makes no difference
nor the frozen, formal dress shirt
for an impossible ball without orchids.
You're condemned to black. Your trousers
blend into darkness. Your shoes
bulbous in the dim glare of an alley
are nocturnal toadstools. The quasi-
top hat —black sun— looms raylessly above it all.
Thus, nocturnal citizen of a republic
in mourning, you materialize before our
dubious eyes, which inspect you and reflect:
Behold the gloomy one, the widower, the inconsolable,
the raven, the nevermore, the too late arrival
in a very old world.

And the moon alights
on your face. White, chalked with death,
what sepulchers it evokes or what chilling
submarine stalks, and mirrors
and lilies that some tyrant has severed, and visages
shrouded in flour. The black mustache
sits on you like a warning
but all at once interrupted. It's short, thick
ebony. Oh white face of lunar landscape
semblance cut from a sheet, tracing on a wall
childhood notebook, scarcely image at all.
Yet the eyes are profound, the mouth from somewhere faraway
knowledgeable, alone, quietly it comes
to smile, a dawn for all.

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And now we no longer fear the night.
Death avoids us, we grow smaller
as if, by the touch of your magical cane, restored
to the secret land where all children sleep.
Now it's no longer the office with thousands of files
the garage, the university, the alarmclock
it's the old demolished street with its crowded shops
and off we go with you to smash a windowpane
and off we go with you to topple constables to the ground
and off we go to rediscover in the human anatomy
that place —careful!— that calls for swift kicks: verdict
from a justice far lower than official.

III

Full of nutritious hypotheses, you stamp out the hunger
of those not invited to our suppers, celestial or
industrial. There are dog bones, puddings made
of jelly and cherry and chocolate and clouds
in all the folds of your overcoat. They've been saved
for the child or the mongrel, since well you know
the need to eat, the smell of soup
the taste of meat, the white softness of potatoes
and well you've practiced the subtle art of transforming the
humble lace
of your shoes into macaroni.
Well, somehow you've managed dinner again: life is good!
And now for a smoke, as you lift a cigarette out
from a sardine tin.

There aren't many dinners in the world, you appreciate that
and the most succulent chickens
are protected on china platters by heavy glass.
There's always a lid, and it never breaks
plus steel, asbestos, the law
an entire army to guard every chicken
while a hunger comes all the way from Canada, and a wind
a glacial voice, a wintry gust, until a leaf

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dances indecisively, then lights on your shoulder, faint message
you barely decipher. The inviolable crystal lies somewhere
between chicken and hunger; and between hunger and hand
the law of walls, of distance. So finally you transform yourself
into the great roast chicken that flutters
above all hungers, high in the air: chicken of gold
on paper embers; meal for all
on a day for all, too late to arrive.

IV

The New Year itself is late, much like your sweetheart.
At the lonely little table your talents are accentuated:
you're a ballet dancer, fluid and incorporeal,
but no one's going to show up and see how you ache
with the ardor of diamonds and the delicacy of dawn
or how the shack, at your touch, turns into the moon.
World of snow and salt, of hoarse gramophones
howling in the distance with pleasures you never partake in.
Inaccessible world, that deprives you of your sweetheart
and every other desire, in the night, for communion.
Your palace evaporates, sleep engulfs you
nobody wanted you, everybody has someone else
you hoped to give all, they wouldn't accept.

Then you step on the ice and slip on a scream.
Yet you've no envy of banquets, nor pride
nor pain nor rage nor malice.
You're the New Year itself, still dawdling along the way. A whole
house goes whirling by you, glasses fly
bodies suddenly upturned, and your sweetheart
searching everywhere in the night . . . fails to find you
little you
simple you, ordinary you.

To be so alone in the midst of so many shoulders,
to parade like thousands, in that skinny little body
and have arms big enough to wrap around houses,
with your one foot in Guerrero and the other in Texas

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to speak the same to a Chinaman as to an Amazonian
a Russian, a black: to become the one and only, among us all
without words, or filters
or opals
that vast city within you, unknown to us.

V

A blind woman falls in love with you. Suddenly her eyes
open. No, she no longer loves you. A wealthy fellow
befriends you while drunk, but sobered up scorns
your riches. The confusion is ours, as we forget
what there is of water, of breeze, of innocence
at the bottom of each one of us, earthbound as we are.
But oh, the false myths we abide by: drab flowers
treacherous angels, circular coffers, asthmatically
poetic academies; conventions in blue
white and purple; machinery, piles
of telegrams, factories and factories
and factories of lamps, prohibitions, dawns.
You're just a common laborer
ordered about by the angry voice in the megaphone.
You're a cog, a spasm, a grimace.
I pick up your parts, still vibrating,
mutilated lizard.

I paste your pieces together. Yours
is a strange oneness, in a world completely pulverized.
And we, who at each step cover ourselves
and undress and mask ourselves,
scarcely grasp the same man in you
apprentice
fireman
cashier
confectioner
emigrant
convict
mechanic

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groom
skater
soldier
musician
wayfarer
circus performer
marquis
sailor
piano mover
meanwhile always only you yourself
the one who doesn't agree but is too meek,
incapable of ownership, foot-
loose, an open road, the friend
we'd like to come in
out of the rain, the mirror, the memory,
and still we lose him.

VI

I no longer think of you, but only of the trade
you practice. Strange watchmaker,
you sniff at the dismantled parts and the mainspring
activates: time commences. You're a window washer.
You sweep streets. It doesn't matter
if the urge to shirk eats away at you. And the next corner
makes another man of you, while logic
excludes from you its calculating privileges.

Oh, there's energy in you, but capricious
but benevolent
and from it emerge arts, in no way bourgeois
products of thin air and tears, apparel
which presents us with wings or petals, and trains
and ships without steel, where our friends
by spinning in place can travel through time
where books become animated, paintings talk
and everything set free dissolves
into an effusion of love without recompense, and smiles, and
sunshine.

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Your trade, it's one that places you
right in the midst of us all:
vagabond between two shifts, a skilled hand
at hammering, cutting, spinning, plastering
your feet insist on scuffling you round the world.
Your hands poke about for some implement: it's a razor
and to the rhythm of Brahms you commence to shave
in that forgotten barbershop at the heart of an oppressed world
where after so much emptiness and silence we repossess you.

You were right to have kept quiet.
You pondered in the shadow of locks
chains, striped clothes, barbwire fences
you piled up harsh words, stones, cement, bombs, accusations
you registered with a hidden pencil the thousands of deaths,
the thousands
of bleeding mouths, the thousands of arms enfolded.
You said nothing at all. But a lump, a gorge
in the throat, and the words about to spew.
Oh demoralized words, rescued finally, spoken anew.
Oh power of human expression inventing new words and
breathing fresh life into the old, long exhausted.
Oh dignity of the voice sounded in just anger and profound love,
root of the human spirit, irritated tree, withstanding the fury
and oppression of dictators.
Oh Charlie, mine and everyone's companion, your shoes and
mustache amble along a highway of dusty hope.

*translated from the Portuguese*
*by Thomas Colchie*

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*Jonathan Galassi*

## Lateness

Lateness is all that shimmers in the leaves,
that trembles in the bending grass,
that glistens on the berries on the vine.
Even before the final glut of summer
there is an inkling of the coming wine.
That special warmth of sunlight on your cheek
is a last kiss, the silence in the trees
is one last breath held back before September
sharpens its shears for pruning and a chill
unpolishes the surface of the lake.

Lateness is all: the aura of Before
is telling you to glory in the fall,
knowing this season's fruit is not for you.
It is still basking, rounding on its stem,
still tied to life; but you are looking on
into the conflagration that will come.
Last days are fire and water while the grape
is gathered and its sweetness is expressed,
and every afternoon's a little less
expansive, till the gold days are gone.

Are you ready to be harvested?
When all the weeds of summer have been mown,
will you be here to prove that last is best
with the high apples staying in the trees
for the long vistas of the final days
and the immense sharp stars? Will you be here,
still breathing in the temple of the air
and seeing through the bonfire of the fall,
where being and having been are everything
and lasting is all: you know that lateness is all.

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*Jim Gauer*

## Will This Thought Do?

So I don't think I'll work today. Today it seems best
To let this bench hold my end up. Today
Of what my part was, brooding
Over the sum of things, there remains
Only the sum of things, and that part
Seems best. Yes this morning, whatever is
Will do nicely in my absence: this sunlight
Looks fine, it seems to be holding
Its own without me; the crowded sidewalk
Is fully employed, it appears its task
Has come to be child's play; even the trees
Are doing well, they seem to be working
As well as trees can, as trees
These truly work, and the things they do
Are all nicely done. What a relief
To be wide awake, knowing my wakefulness
Doesn't need me, sure that my bench exists,
Never doubting its existence beneath me, knowing
For sure that it is truly beneath me
To sit on a bench that I doubt exists.
How sweet to be fully alive, for just this morning
To have nothing to live for, to think well of my thought,
The way a child thinks of his childhood, the way that a tree
Makes do with its boughs, the way this moment lives
On what it's seized in its hands, because this morning
What the moment has seized in its hands
Is sweet and alive, and this thought will do.
Will this thought do? It seems it's already done so.
Will this thought do? Today there could be no doubt.
Will this thought do? Today beyond the shadow
Of a doubt my thought is done with
All the light I doubted, and now

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Its shadow believes it too.
At last I know I'm the genius that no one needs to listen to.
Ontologist of a morning that turned out better than he
thought.
The thinker there on a park bench, resting his chin
In a hand I gave him, a hand I traded
For a day of rest, for a moment's peace
I could have had no hand in, for an instant
Under just this sky that out of the clear blue
Has come to me, as silent as I am,
Full of birds I did not think up.
No I don't think I'll work today. Today it sounds best
To let the silence work its ends out. Today
Of what my words were, sounds
Forming the heart of things, there remains
Only the heart of things, and this heart
Rings true.

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*Allen Ginsberg*

## Quatrains

Those high lunches needn't matter
If you are of businessman's age
Anyway he enjoyed creating food
drifting across the Fragrant Nation

Who was it that began the mouth talk
Gave the citizens thoughtful Saliva
Nature boy came close to Government
Secret police maintained their ham & eggs

O what tragedy for multiple Chickens
O how pigs dreamt butcher night!
Sheep squawked nightmare, goat
fish sent regrets from meadow and sea

If he only could have made new Congress
We wouldn't breathe so much sulphur smog
Sugar dances at the movies, coffee tells you on TV
and Sodium Nitrate & Nicotine Cholesterol

have nothing to do with Foreign policy.
Nature boy drifts into Central American oblivion
with Seminole Patchwork and Albert Einstein.
Nobody thought heat rays would end the world.

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*Jorie Graham*

## Description

Meet me, meet me whisper the waters from the train
  window and the small
    skiff adrift
with its passenger, oarless, being pulled in by
some destination, delicate, a blossom on the wing of
the swollen waters.

Will you take him there to the remedy he needs, intelligence,
current, will you take him singing his song, back in, note by
note? She has the
antidote, the girl at the end, the girl who is the end, she
  has the only
    cure

which is her waiting and waiting, which is how she will not
  move or
    change
her mind that is
no mind. Waste
and empty
    the sea,

love, through which the only passage tugs.
He's floating down through the air-killed reeds,
    past the refinery,
he's floating stretched out in that eye-shaped
boat (is he

awake), the parking lot of the recycling plant
returning to the light
maybe a thousand bodies of cars, the argument
changing, changing,

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till it's later and you can look
because the brightness has gone.
There's a church in back of which a parking lot
is weeds (the water is widening, will he

awaken?) and the flat tarred roof of the Martin
Marietta plant so thick with broken glass and ash at 97 mph,
  the words LAST
    and ANITA
spelled out in empties

on one end. The tar
must be hot now I
think or he thinks floating under the rush hour traffic
  through the
    cooler bands
under the bridge, his tiny craft
blinking on and off where patches of glass still hold
in the corners of the gutted
    warehouse windows,
a bit of him quick
in each splinter,
    unseized, unatoned, his passage helplessly re-

iterated, stuttered and finally extinguished where the
  buildings end and
    the oilfields

begin. The cemetery; the demolition
yard; someone's gigantic crane
sorting soft metals from hard from plastic from

glass into beautiful
mounds. He's almost
at the mouth now. Will I see him awaken. Will I
    see him
go under, the highways thicker here, the sound of speed

overriding the winds. The reasons
for things, love, are growing

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wild; wild and inaudible in these meadows of lateness.
The *reasons* sticky like the hot light over all

the combustible fluids—: still apart, heat and fuel,
still bodied, still free. Westward strain the eyes,
eastward the ship flies, the rudderless boat, the sleepy
passenger mortally

wounded. How far will he go pulled in by the listening of
that far
shore?

And as she approached, unable still to see any body
within,
she heard to her heart's delight a lovely harp,
a sweet voice,
and as long as he harped and as long as he sang
she never stirred to

save him.

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*Linda Gregg*

## Part of Me Wanting Everything to Live

This New England kind of love reminds me
of the potted chrysanthemum my husband
gave me. I cared for it faithfully,
turning the pot a quarter turn each day
as it sat by the window until the blossoms
hung with broken necks on the dry stems.
Cut off the dead parts and watched
green leaves begin, new buds open.
Thinking the chrysanthemum would not die
unless I forced it to. The new flowers
were smaller and smaller, resembling
little eyes awake and alone in the dark.
I was offended by the lessening,
by the cheap renewal. By a going on
that gradually left the important behind.
But now it's different. I want the large
and near, and endings more final. If it must
be winter, let it be absolutely winter.

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*Barbara Guest*

## The View from Kandinsky's Window

An over-large pot of geraniums on the ledge
the curtains part
a view from Kandinsky's window.

The park shows little concern with Kandinsky's history
these particular buildings are brief about his early life
reflections of him seen from the window
are busy with preparations for exile
the relevance of the geranium color.

Partings, future projects
there are exceptional changes meant to occur
he will confront an axis, rearrange spatial decisions
the geranium disappears, so shall a person.

His apartment looking down on a Square
the last peek of Russia
an intimate one knowing equipment vanishes.

At Union Square the curtains are drawn
diagonals greet us, those curves and sharp city
verticals he taught us their residual movements,

The stroke of difficult white finds an exit
the canvas is clean, pure and violent
the rhythm of exile in its vein,

We have similar windows, balconies, scale,
degrees of ingress, door knobs daffodils
like Kandinsky's view from his window
distance at the street end.

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*Anthony Hecht*

## Humoresque

*Passengers will please refrain*
*from flushing toilets while the train*
*is standing in the station. I love you.*

From sewage lines, man-holes, from fitted brass
Sphincters and piston chambers, from the dark
Gastrointestinal corridors of hell,
Deep among wheels and oily underbellies
Of Wagon Lits emerge these screeching ghosts,
*Doomed for a certain term to walk the night*,
Erupting here and there in baggy forms
That cloud, occlude and spirit away the luggage,
Facteurs and passengers from this vast barn
Of skeletal iron and grimed membranes of glass.
This pestilent congregation of vapors sings
In pentecostal tongues, now shrill, now soft,
Mixed choral dolorosos by Satie
To the god Terminus, the living end
Of every journey, whom the Romans charmed
With gifts of blood and ashes, and who today
Comes up from under as pale S. Lazare,
Come back to tell us all, and tell us off,
And tell and tell, as the bells toll and trains
Roll slowly to their sidings, issuing ghosts.
These rise and fade into the winter air
Already grey with souls of the departed
Through which indifferent pigeons lift and bank
And flutter in the vague and failing warmth,
Which, like the curling lamias of *Gauloise*,
The shiny rigor mortis of the rails,
Blends with the exhalations of my love.

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*John Hollander*

## By the Gulf

Off to the Gulf and hoping to have the time of our lives,
We found but the signs of fever there: the prostrate horizon,
Unable to drink of the distance, and only appearing at sundown,
In a clear condition of length, to show any strength at all.
And over the blue of the water, the sun from out of the desert,
Waging in daily rage a *jihad* against the inane
Or, holding the body of night, sinking to languorous slumber,
Allowed of no shadowy play, or the vanishing dance of transitions.
More and more then we read at the texts we had taken along—
Letters of palpable liars, memoirs of exiled queens,
Mysteries, guides to the local antiquities, till the tidal
Rise and fall, and the puzzling smudges of cloud, and the question
Of what the light was like, scribbled their learned comments
Over the endpapers, over all the available flyleaves,
Until we were left with this sort of touching but pointless notation:

*When the Temple stood we feasted on the roasted meat of the altar,*
*Now, in the time of remembering, our joy is the warming wine.* Or

"M'amour" *sighs the thrush in May, recalled as a lower*
"Ma mort"
*By the bird of oncoming autumn: Love calls to Love and Like*
*To Like, as the daughters of water sang out to the boy of the wood*
*Till he followed and fell in their arms, becoming one with the water.*

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Or, *Madame Mamamouchie's crystal sphere could show in its shadows*
*Never the future, but only the hidden heart of the present:*
*Your face, smeared into distortion; the fragments of lamplight; Madame's*
*Ne'er-do-well nephew, a manic assassin, approaching behind you.*

Mostly, we left them back on the sands, these books of remembrance,
Charming in their marginalia, inapplicable to ourselves,
There by the Gulf. Not wishing to be confined by example
Or to be left behind, fretting, in our hotel rooms
While all the others went off to observe the splendid events
And exclaim at the famous sites, we joined their daily excursions,
After all. That was it, at the Gulf; and then having the time
Of our lives and the space of our language to move in, we set out for home,
Toward which, we have been assured, our troublesome journeys are headed.

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# Children with the House to Themselves

## Nadine Gordimer

The house to themselves. Children with the house to themselves. When they were still children, what wild release that signalled; romping from room to room, all lights burning, bedtime banished, the thrills of outlawry within the safety of home; the housemaid's protests to scatter them, shrieking, only to recommence the game of freedom, because Bettie's authority was no more founded in reality than the game.

On Friday night, after Pauline, Joe and the third child of the family, Carole had left for the weekend, Bettie cooked the meal of chops and chips—Sasha's favorite as a child—for which his mother, Pauline, had left instructions. Hillela sat on the floor untidily as a rag doll propped there, telephoning, all animation gathered into her chance to talk without interruption from others wanting to use the phone. She was making arrangements to go out, Sasha knew. He went away to some other part of the house so as not to listen to his cousin's conversation. But she did not go out.

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Sasha? Sasha?

He heard her looking for him.

Sasha?

She was in the garden, now. He went to his mother's room, that overlooked the direction of the voice. From the silent observation of the room that held the engine hum of Pauline and Joe's lives, he saw her shadow sloping away from her. He waited to hear her call again.

Sasha?

The cat came running, as it would to anything that sounded like a summons to food or fondling. Their shadows joined as she stopped to chide and croon at it for being so stupid. He opened the closed window that marked the absence of his parents and jumped. Out of the stiff cold oleander bushes whose dead leaves smoothed past his legs like blunt knives, his shadow joined hers and the cat's. For a while the angled, elongated mobile that was the three shadows jazzed, darted, and leant towards and away from the tilted phantom of the house, all cast over the dead lawn by the light of stars piercing a spill of jagged ice across the sky. The cat's eyes, as she drew the pair into one of her zany night ecstasies, were moons, rather than the sliver lifted too high and far in the black clarity of space. Their round phosphorescent gold, the flash of translucence as she pranced in profile, brought back the moons of summer, the nights of the smell of burning flesh from suburban *braaivleis*. Then she was gone.

Sasha had on his sweater but like most young males who live in a climate of long summers and never accept the brief reality of winter, he wore about the house, in all seasons, the same shorts and rubber-thonged sandals. The cold steeped his legs palpably as water; Hillela puffed out a breath to see it hang in the air. They went through the gate, each with arms crossed, hugging self, and began to walk; to walk the streets of the suburb as people are brought out by a summer night. Block after block; they passed through planes, bared horizontals and verticals stripped by winter. Abstract shapes; only among the pavement jacarandas, that do not shed their leaves till spring, each streetlight swam, a luminous fish in a cave of green carved out of

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the night. Although when the three young people—Hillela and her cousins, Sasha and Carole—were together, there was the fidgety adolescent abhorrence of silence, the need to talk simply because one is alive, the two did not talk much. Hillela hummed one of her guitar tunes now and then. When they did exchange a remark, a phrase or laugh shattered the clear cold like a stone thrown. At times there was the feeling, in the rhythm of their progress, that they might be making for somewhere; at others (when a corner was reached), that they were looking for a destination. There was none; or none other. They arrived back at the gate. All the lights were burning in the house except in Pauline and Joe's bedroom, where a window stood open. Bettie had not locked up, knowing there was no one to reproach her neglect. The house was one of those legendary ships that sail on, fully rigged, without a living soul aboard.

They stamped in, Hillela putting her hands, warm from her pockets, over red-cold ears. Now she would go to the telephone, now she would put on lipstick, fluff her hair with her fingers and leave him there. . . . Now he waited for her to call goodbye. She appeared with a pair of his football socks on over her jeans, threw a second pair for him to catch. —Don't worry, I haven't been into any of your things. They weren't put in your room yet, they were among stuff Bettie's washed.—

The house to themselves. Even the children they had been had slipped away forever in the adult silences of a night walk. He offered: —D'you want a fire?—

—Too much fag to go out for wood.—

—I feel like a drink.—

—Okay, I'll make tea. Coffee?—

—I mean a drink. What about you?—

But without waiting for her to say, he went to take a bottle of wine from his father's rack and forgot the glasses. She brought the first thing she saw in the kitchen, two cocoa mugs.

—Hillela!—

—It'll taste the same.—

He went for glasses.

Smiling, she watched him open the bottle. —You're supposed to wipe the rim.—

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—Why, it's not dirty.—

—I don't know. They always do—when I'm staying at Aunt Olga's. And Uncle Arthur always sniffs it first.—

—And what's that in aid of.—

To see if it's corked.—

He filled the glasses. —The education you're getting—what a great start in life.—

Hillela took his sharpness kindly, with enjoyment. Her cheekbones, dusky-red with cold, lifted under her strange eyes whose iris, he had examined and explained to her, had no grain to differentiate it from the dark pupil. —At least I'm learning to drive.—

—Ja, more than I am. But you ought to get your learner's licence, you know. I suppose you're driving around illegally all over the place.—

—In what? Olga gives me the lessons, but you don't think she'd lend me her car!—

—Your friends let you, I'm sure. They wouldn't have any better sense, that crowd of yours.—

Hillela was always in command of any subject of conversation, changed it at will. —*You* teach me to play chess.—

He looked at her. —Now?—

—Yes.—

He drank, struck a note from the glass with thumb and forefinger. —What for?—

—*What for.* To play, of course. Oh you think I'm too stupid.—

At once his face was sullen with anxiety. —You are not stupid, Hillela.— He moved his head as if tethered somewhere; and broke loose. —You are the most intelligent person living in this house.—

She laughed and made an exaggerated movement pretending to spill her wine. —Of course. There's no one here except you.—

—And it's true.—

—Then only you think so.— At once she turned away quickly from what she had said. —Come on. We've got all night.—

They took the bottle and went into Joe's study, intending to fetch the chess set that was kept on a filing cabinet, but instead of returning to the livingroom, settled themselves there

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with the radiator turned on and the wine at hand, in that room in the house that was never for general use, where Bettie was not even allowed to dust because of the importance and confidentiality of the papers and documents filed and piled within it. (Like most conscientious lawyers, Joe did much of his work at home, after office hours.) They lifted the legs of the burdened desk and pulled from beneath it the sheepskin foot rug, to sit on, they dumped the papers from a stool to make of it a low table between them. Given in, Sasha was explaining to her. —It's too abstract for you. You'll learn, all right. But you'll only want to play when there's nothing else to do. And that's not what chess is. How shall I say—you'll always be wanting to do something else.—

She was setting up the men, an Africanized set made of malachite. —I don't want to do something else.—

Sasha was looking at Hillela, looking at her. Yes, she was there; she had not, tonight, called out *goodbye*.

In the small hours, the child abandoned in the dark and cold came back to possess a body again for a moment. Sasha woke to some awful interruption; he had the sensation of a terrible discovery and disbelief he had had when, for a period when he was already around eight years old, he would find he had wet the bed. But it was a regular slamming sound, and not a tactile sensation, that had wakened him; his bed was dry, he was not alone, there was the wonderful heavy warmth of breasts against him, and the passing time that brought him to consciousness was measured by the gentle clock of another's breathing. Hillela was there. There was nobody else. He got up and went, knowing his way in the dark in this empty house, to that bedroom where the window had been left open and was banging to and fro in the wind.

Her charges had cooked breakfast for themselves by nine o'clock, when Bettie pushed the kitchen door open with the armful of pots and dishes brought back from her man's dinner eaten in her yard room the night before. She was satisfied rather than pleased. —You old enough now not to make such a mess!— She washed up for them, her reproaches affectionate, a routine

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assertion of her field of efficiency. Although Hillela was like a daughter in the house where she had been taken in when her parents divorced, she did not have quite the proxy authority to give Bettie the day off. Sasha told her she needn't bother to stay, he and Hillela would find their own food. —And tonight? For dinner?—

—It's Saturday. We'll be out. Saturday night, Bettie.—

She swept eggshells into the bin, laughing. —Him? When do you ever go out dancing? Hillela, she'll be having a nice time, but you . . . Sasha . . . You afraid of the girls, I'm sure.—

Not a man, to her, yet the white man in the house, for that weekend: —Please, Sasha, go and see what's wrong in Alpheus's place. There's no light, the water's not hot, nothing. They can't warm the food for the baby.—

—Probably a fuse blown, that's all. There's a box of wires in the broom cupboard. You know, on that small shelf. Alpheus can replace it himself.—

—No, no, you must go. If he messes something up, who is it going to be in trouble? Me, that's the one.—

—You're a terrible nag. Why can't you trust Alpheus?—

—Because Alpheus he'll sit there with candles and he won't ask! Won't say nothing! I'm the one, for everybody. Must speak for everybody.—

Sasha was rummaging for the wire.

—Oh you are good to me. Thanks, ay. Thanks, Mouser.—

To be called by that name was to meet with blankness someone who makes the claim in the street: Don't you know me? It was himself, *Mouser*, one of the many pet names of childhood that evolve far from their origin, in the manner of Cockney rhyming slang. It might have had something to do with big ears (Mickey Mouse), with a liking for getting into small enclosed places; with pinching cheese, or the catlike patience and curiosity of a solemn small boy. Even his mother, who had had so many names to express her delight in him then, would have forgotten, in her loss. That Bettie was still allowed to bring it out incongruously was more a mark of condescension to her than a privilege accorded. Despite her house-training, by Pauline, in awareness of her own dignity, she had her lapses into the manner

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of other blacks, which perhaps needed less of an effort against the grain of their identical situation as servants.

The absent Carole went in and out of what had been a garage and was now the home of Alpheus and his family, a clerk in Joe's office who could not find anywhere to live in the black locations. The lawyer broke the law, housing on his property any black who was not a domestic; Carole's mother paid for correspondence courses so that Alpheus might better himself, and Carole loved his baby. She and Alpheus's girl made clothes for it on Pauline's sewing machine that Carole had taken over to the garage. Sometimes she shared a meal there. But Hillela showed no interest in the inhabitants across the yard, and Alpheus was some sort of issue between Sasha and his mother that nobody but the two of them was aware of; when he came home for the holidays from his integrated school over the border, there was the expectation that he would go to talk to Alpheus as he liked to renew acquaintance each time with all that was familiar.

—What about?— He knew she naturally assumed that the kind of school he was privileged to live in must provide an ease of communication with the young man she herself could not have. She wouldn't say it, but he wouldn't let her off. —I live with black boys all the time, I've got nothing particular in common with Alpheus.—

Neither he nor Hillela had been in the garage since it had become a family home. Frilly curtains on a sagging wire, smell of burned cooking and the sweetish cloy of confined human occupation, a hi-fi installation hanging the festoons of luxury over napkins, bed and cooker—its existence became real around the sense of their presence as strangers; bringing a sense of this not only here, but in the house across the yard where they had moved in from night streets.

Alpheus was a soft-voiced helper as he and Sasha dismantled the single electrical outlet whose plastic had melted and melded with the overload of plugs connected through an adaptor. —You need a separate outlet for the hi-fi. They'll have to get an electrician to install another lead from the main.— Alpheus took the advice as if it were something he could follow

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in the practical course of things. But both knew he had bought what he did not want his benefactors to know about, because he had no business spending money on such things as hi-fi equipment, any more than he should have burdened himself, at nineteen, with a family. Alpheus's girl, hanging about in the background, acknowledged Hillela with the gazing politeness, gone completely still, of a player in the children's game of 'statues' when the leader turns suddenly to confront those moving secretly behind him. The girl was wearing one of Carole's favorite dresses Hillela now realized she had not seen for some time; she had worn it herself, she and Carole often exchanged clothes in this sisterly manner as Carole apparently did with Alpheus's girl.

In many ways, it was a long way from the house across the yard to Alpheus's garage. It was the only outing they took, that Saturday. Hillela did not use the telephone. It was a day before them, all around them, untouched at either end or beginning (as Friday had been) by the week that preceded it or the week that would follow when on Sunday night familiarity, a family, would return. The luxury of its wholeness extended the ordinary course of a day, measured time differently, as Hillela's breathing had measured it in the night. The cat followed and stayed with them everywhere, perhaps only because they did not know the intervals at which it was accustomed to getting scraps from Bettie. It kneaded Sasha's thighs and Hillela kissed one by one the four sneakers of white feet for which it had got its name, Takkie. What they took for affection, weaving them into its caresses, was only greed. They themselves did not touch. There were several chess lessons that ended in laughter, they even quarreled a little; it was impossible to have Hillela to oneself, at one's mercy, without frustration: suspicion of her openness, disbelief at her lack of adolescent apprehension, envy of her—what?

Adults begin to predicate from the time children are very small. What do you want to be when you grow up? What are you going to do when you leave school? What career are you interested in? This predication was not an answer to anything about life it was needed to know. These questions, formulae

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put by men and women preoccupied by financial takeovers, property speculation, political manoeuvres, divorces, Sasha knew were lies. From the beginning.

—They knew you were never going to be an engine driver. Not if they could help it. They despise engine drivers. They knew even then it's not going to be what you want to *be*, it's what the society you live in is going to make of you. It's not what career, it's what they've already decided you'll settle for, so they can say *they've* done all they could for you.—

—You should do whatever you want to do.—

—Can't you understand?—

—You wrangle away at it too much. You'll need money; you'll have to work. That's all.—

—I don't understand you. You're the one who's had a lousy time, you've been pushed around as it suited them, and you—I don't know . . . No one's less free than you! What's going to happen when you leave school next year? Are they going to pass the hat round to send you to university?—

—Don't be unfair, you know they would.—

—Or are they thinking that for you, it's a typing course and a job through influence at the Institute of Race Relations, and someone will pay for a degree by correspondence, on the cheap, like for Alpheus.—

—Well, maybe I'll go to Rhodesia.— Her father was a travelling salesman, there. Her mother, sister of Pauline and Olga, had gone to Mozambique with someone who was known namelessly as "another man."

—You've just thought of that for something to say, this minute.—

She laughed; they were eating apples and the juice trickled between her teeth.

—Maybe I'll get a job.—

—What job?—

—Oh . . . journalism, or maybe nursing.—

—But which, for Pete's sake? The difference is tremendous, total. You'd think it was choosing between chocolate or vanilla. When do you suppose you'll decide?—

—Then. I'll say then. Nursing; newspaper.—

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—Hilly, Rhodesia's a horrible place, there's going to be a war there.—

—Len never says anything.—

—When he writes you a birthday card, no.—

With regular bites, she was shaping a spool out of the apple core.

—Sasha . . . Why do you let everything get in your hair . . . Sasha . . .—

He felt a fresh surge of anger. —Because you forgive them.—

The castaway raft that was carrying the day dropped out of the rapids into quiet water. She played the guitar to herself, bent over cradling it to save him from disturbance. Out of his first week's pay at the liquor store where he had a holiday job, he had bought himself some books, and had begun one this weekend. *The Brothers Karamazov* was in the house in the old red hardback uniform edition of Dostoevsky, along with all the other books under whose influence he had been reared without knowing it or having read them, but he had bought the paperback as if the other had not been there all his life, on one of the shelves that narrowed every passage as well as stretched up the walls in every room, and made the smell he associated with home the smell of paper, of the living room fruit bowl, and another odor, more private, that he believed he alone was aware of. He wanted to read the book because he had heard one of the masters at school mention, in a debate on capital punishment (the school tried hard to introduce issues that schoolboys could not be expected to ponder), that the writer Dostoevsky had stood before a firing squad and found himself suddenly reprieved instead of dead. The extremity of this experience attracted Sasha, who sometimes was secretly drawn to the possibility of committing suicide. One of the reasons for the anger which Hillela had gently mocked was that he felt his mother had wormed this secret out of him—not in words, but in the concentration of signs only she and he could read: the way he left a room, the shift in his attention when someone was speaking—he could not stop her adding these things up. But he was safe from that secret now. Hillela was there. It was not possible to think of nonexistence while she was close by, her

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bare foot with the one funny crooked toe stretched towards the afternoon fire they had made for themselves.

He was disappointed with the visit to the holy Zossima (rationalism was one of the parental influences he was unaware of; religious mysticism bored him) until Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov embarrassed his sons by making a ridiculous scene before Zossima. But after that the new reader entered the novel as millions had done before him, though to him it seemed its knowledge of all he needed to know—that nobody would ever tell him, even if everything was discussed in his parents' house, the talking never stopped—was part of the possession of the house boarded this silent weekend when it was lit up and empty. As he read his absorption deepened like the stages of sleep; and he was aware of his companion only the way the cat, actually asleep, showed gratitude for the comfort of human presence and the fire's warmth, by now and then flexing thorns through the white fur of a paw. Then he fell into a passage that seemed to isolate and surround him. "I am that insect, brother, and it is said of me specially. All we Karamazovs are such insects. And, angel as you are, that insect lives in you, too, and will stir up a tempest in your blood. Tempests, because sensual lust is a tempest! Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it has not been fathomed and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Here the boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side. I am not a cultivated man, brother, but I've thought a lot about this. It's terrible what mysteries there are!"

He did not know Hillela had stopped playing her guitar; he had not been listening. She wandered out of the room, and that she was not there any longer he felt immediately. He thought he heard her calling. Some other sound, the susurrus of the shower; perhaps he imagined the voice, like the voices heard under a waterfall. He went to the bathroom door and rapped a five-finger exercise. She did call something. He rapped again. Hillela opened the door, pink paths showing all over her dark drenched head, streams of water licking her breasts, the springy stamens of her pubic hair brilliant with shaking drops. A hollow of pale mauve shadow went from each lean

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hip-bone, that was like the lip of a conch, down to the groin. —I boiled myself by the fire.— He looked at her. Not at her face; and she was watching him, both encouraging and anxious, a kind of happiness. He kissed the breasts, letting them wet his face. He knelt down and pressed closed eyes and mouth against that wet moss that the poor boys at school had tried to represent in ugly drawings in the lavatories. She reached for a sponge and squeezed it over his head. The water ran down his colorless hair and plastered it: she teased —Just like an old mango pip.— They played; through the open door the house was filled with shouts and laughter. The shower was still plashing. They fought and slithered in the steam. She pulled him under the fall of water and he struggled out of his wet clothes and imprisoned her, cool and ungraspable. The water found a path round the meeting of their bellies and poured down their thighs. She la-la-la-ed, he pushed her head under the full force of the jet.

They dried their hair by the fire. He toweled hers vigorously, but her resistance was weak and laughing, the game was running down; the smell of Hillela's hair was identifiable as the source of the intimations of her that he had found, over several years now, in her jacket that hung in the jumble behind a door, on a cushion on the old sofa, in a jersey left inside-out, as it had been pulled off, sleeves holding the shape of her impatient push up to elbows.

Hunger was also a happiness. He cooked up a rich red-and-yellow mess of tinned tomatoes and mushrooms, tuna fish and cheese, an expert in clandestine boarding-school cuisine. They carried it to the fire and camped on the floor. The cat filched bits of fish with the club of a curved paw and spat out each morsel several times to get rid of the tomato coating. Sasha put her through the window, Hillela let her in again. Sasha suggested he would take another bottle of wine but neither wanted it. The telephone rang; Hillela was sopping up sauce with a piece of bread, he put down his plate, she waved the crust, and he did not know whether it was a signal that he should answer. She cleaned her plate with conscientious gusto, making figures of eight, while he counted the rings, nine, ten, eleven, and

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the last cut off in the middle. Within such content so many things seemed possible, even easy. —All you need is enough dough for a cheap one-way ticket. If you can get that together, then you can work your way round Europe. There must be people we know we could stay with . . . connections.—

—Billie—she's got family in London. You know—my stepmother.—

—Anyway, I want to keep away from youth hostels. I've had enough of living in dormitories. They say in France, if you go to the south where so many rich people are, you can get taken on as crew for a yacht. Girls too. There's someone at school, his brother went all the way to the Bahamas—fantastic. The trouble is, we'll finish school in December of next year—

—November.—

—Same thing; it's winter in Europe. But we could work in ski resorts for a bit.—

Hillela shivered.

—Cold places.— A fearful intake of breath.

—That's because it's something you can't even imagine. The sun is hot, the snow is cold—it's like eating sorbet and drinking black coffee.—

She smiled praisingly. —How d'you know.—

He caught her hand, patted himself on the head with it. —I know, I just know.—

—And Carole could join up with us somewhere.—

—Carole?—

He stared at her. She looked back with the face of someone practical, considering ways and means.

—But she'll still be at school.—

—In the holidays. It'll be fun. The three of us. Like here.—

Orange and blue liquid pulsed in the coals. It measured perhaps a minute. He picked up his book again, and, as the cat would look about fastidiously for a place to lie, slowly settled his head in her lap, where the plate had been. She grabbed a cushion, lifted his head, and put the cushion beneath. He had been reading, on and off, all day. She looked to see how far along he was by now: more than two hundred pages. —What about the bathroom.—

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Only the pilot light of his conscious attention burned. —We'll clean up later. There's all day tomorrow.—

She began to read over his head; when he got to the end of a page before her, her hand went down to hold him back. As she caught up with the sense of the narrative their pace drew even, so that they were reading at the same instant the same passage: "I want you to know me. And then to say goodbye. I believe it's always best to get to know people just before leaving them."

Sasha closed the book and put it aside without marking his place with the torn bus ticket he used, but the spine of the paperback, bent as far as he had read, lifted the pages apart from the rest at that point. After a while her hand stirred as if about to touch his hair, but did not. She bent over, smiling, but his eyes were closed.

—Sasha?—

—Sasha?—

He waited, once again, to hear her call softly, again.

—Sasha?—

He opened his eyes and suddenly began to yawn, yawned till his eyes watered, full of tears.

They got up. She stood a moment, waiting for him. —I would never go to Rhodesia.—

She was moving her head very slowly. Feeling him looking at her, a smile turned the edges of her mouth; she might have been being photographed. He approached her very shyly, and kissed her. They wandered through the house, arms about each other's waist, following the trail of their inhabitation: among the legal documents on the study desk, a packet of chocolate broken into, from which she took a square, music tapes among open cans in the kitchen, his telescope (last year's birthday present for a scientifically-minded boy) that he had been tinkering with, on the dining table.

He took the telescope to his room and for a long time, until they got too cold, they drew the moon and stars near through the open window, just as their talk drew near ski resorts, the Bahamas, the anonymous freedom of foreign cities.

They were in the deep sleep of midnight when Pauline came

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quietly into her son's room and saw that there were two in his bed. She turned on the light. The room was cold and stuffy; warm in the core of it was the smell of a body she had known since she gave birth to him, unmistakable to her as the scent that leads a bitch to her puppy, and it was mingled with the scents of sexuality caressed from the female nectary. The cat was a rolled fur glove in an angle made by Sasha's bent knees between calves and thighs. The two in the bed opened their eyes; they focused out of sleep and saw Pauline. She was looking at them, at their naked shoulders above the covers, and she called as if she had come upon intruders in the house—*Joe* . . . She turned and walked out.

They did not move. Something grasped Sasha's innards and was shaking him; he trembled against Hillela. Her body was calm as sun-warmed stone. He spoke. —It's not Sunday.— Hillela said nothing. Her soft, clean, curly hair lay against his neck, the last sensation he had been conscious of as he fell asleep. Hillela was there. Now that terrified him.

Pauline came back with Joe, she was clutching his arm, taking protection. She stopped him in the doorway, against some danger. Sensing attention, the cat began to purr. Pauline's splendid head rose like an archaic representation of the sun aureoled with wild filaments, blinding them and holding them in her gaze. —*Joe. Joe.*— Sasha's mother was imploring his father to tell the intruders not to be there. The cat stretched, jutted rump and tail and jumped off the bed.

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*Richard Howard*

## Stanzas in Bloomsbury: *Mrs. Woolf entertains the notion of a novel about Lord Byron*

. . . wanting to build up my
imaginary figure with every
scrap I could find, when
suddenly the figure turns to
merely one of the usual dead . . .

In search of treasure near the Pyramids
they all became unconscionably coy
having unearthed a vessel tightly sealed
secluded special and being set upon
opening it they found that it contained
one object which they all agreed to be
honey by taste till hairs clinging to
just what was wanted—though it seemed to me
the private parts of an intrepid man
merely silly and tinkling as if once
drawn forth what met their eyes was a boy
—I had ventured into the men's urinal!
his limbs entire the flesh smooth what else
but lust and tenderness afford relief?

I thank you for the bishop's work on God
which I am reading though he prove no more
than what I have always thought: so I am
not impotent but I have had enough
where I was—verging toward Spinoza not
of a mind to write books but to become
alien to his gloomy creed—I would be
nice to other people (only now? this once?)

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better than that: there is a power in me
obsessed beyond all reading to withstand:
I cannot shake it off. I deny nothing
of all the accumulation of the past
but doubt everything. Incessant guests
are quite as bad as solitary jail.

Each man is under his thumb—just conceive
living your life in fear of drying up
and on command plunging from the walls
though I haven't envisaged that fate for myself
enticed with hope of inevitable paradise—
on the contrary shall I ever have time enough
and promise of pleasure—eternal ecstasy
to write out everything that's in my head
ordering this one or that to leap to his doom
—though suppose what's in my head becomes absurd
for the entertainment of others, after which
—but would I even know it afterwards?
still others were pledged that night for their desires
besides I cannot believe I shall ever die . . .

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*Lawrence Joseph*

## London

Aged malt whiskey and cigarettes
    consumed to enhance consciousness
—read Blake. You can't regulate
    the price of necessaries
without destruction. In a bar
    a few streets from the British Museum
across the table from Oxford's
    latest rising literary star;
not much older than you, his
    history is already impressive.
"There are rules, aren't there,"
    he shrugs, agitatedly,
"and decorum, and irony,"
    he clears his throat and, then,
vanishes behind the Royal Exchange,
    beyond the intent stare
of someone, somewhere, aggrieved,
    and the student from the Polytechnic
who laughs after he announces
    he's schizophrenic before he, too,
vanishes down a small lane
    behind the old synagogue
away from where you walk alone
    along Victoria Embankment.
—The sky was low, always low,
    often clear, or raw. You were
the "you" aware of the spite
    and the sorrow. Spirit
to the bone set loose, sensed,
    certain violence. Spirit

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in the blood set loose, moved
    by cold smoke from the rows
evaporating. Those whose faces
    thrust forward, gaunt, no chins,
no more eyes — that kind of look
    possessed. It happened;
it wasn't misunderstanding when that woman
    said she never could have had
or have what you have,
    looked away, too sensitive.
An argument on the last train
    from Cambridge to King's Cross
about — the extent of His
    Lordship's estate. The poplar's shadow,
darker than the bluish light,
    spread across complete silence
on the Green at midnight.
    The fact, in Glasgow, straight
razors were means to threaten
    or deter; the fact we are victims
of our truths was true.
    You ought not to have been
what you were, what you
    might have been was a simple fate
in a bag of wind. Nothingness
    erupted. Everything foretold.

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*James Laughlin*

## A Night at the Opera

I am falling into the abyss
My fate is sealed
What a cruel martyrdom
The open tomb awaits me

I was driven by my insane desire
Who can look upon her without weeping?
God, you see into my heart
This untamed fire devastates all my virtue
He kindled this flame in you
His vile heart
May God's punishment fall upon him

Heaven spare her ravaged heart
She is lost, the unhappy woman
This love is torture for me
Only heaven will hear the sound of my sighing
Nothing on earth can prevent my ruin

Do you choose both death and disgrace?
I am torn apart by remorse
My own heart punishes me
Would I had never made those false vows
How could I bring you joy?
I tremble as I say this.

(*An arrangement of the English captions from a TV production of Donizetti's* Anna Bolena *with Joan Sutherland.* Metteurs-en-scene: *Jill Levine and Vanessa Jackson.*)

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*David Lehman*

## Enigma Variations

1.

Sir Winston Churchill advised against suicide
"Especially when you may live to regret it."
After an endless faculty meeting at Princeton,
Einstein revised his theory of eternity.
"Just a run in time's stocking," said Nabokov.
The child grows older while everyone around him
Stays the age they were when he was born.

The painter and his model change places.
The nude wears a mask. Otherwise she is nude.
Otherwise she is just like all the other passengers
On this hijacked jet suspended over Manhattan.
One terrorist says: Let the death be as illuminating
As the resurrection. Everyone else has frozen
Into the age they were when he was born.

2.

Let the alcoholic transcend his religious upbringing.
Let the Leaning Tower of Pisa stabilize its tilt.
Let the spaces between Pollock's "Blue Poles"
Vibrate with the music of the spheres and
Let the death be as illuminating as the resurrection,
And as beautiful. A million degrees centigrade:
The sun's corona during a total eclipse.

If the world has terrors, said Rilke, then
We must learn to love them, for they belong to us.
Notice the "if." If among all these skeletons
One stood up to denounce his tormentors
Crying "We shall outlive them!" in triumph as if
His escape did not mean his destruction:
The sun's corona during a total eclipse.

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3.

The driver of the hearse seen from the hospital window
Says, "There's room for one more inside,"
And so does the bus conductor the next afternoon.
We know it will crash, but it's our destiny
And we can't escape from our destiny, though
We refuse to climb aboard. A used syringe was found
In the toilet in the back of the bus.
They would never have permitted it in the hospital.

The lovers dreamed in parallel lines that converged
When they woke up, midway between heaven and no place.
I was the blind painter who could see his model
Only by touching her. We met on the bus
Which didn't crash, except when we were asleep
And we could see the place exactly as it was
Except that we were missing from the picture.
They would never have permitted it in the hospital.

4.

Terror links the father, the son, and the sacrificial ram.
Thanks to a choice typo in *Time*,
The Allies snatched victory from "the jews of defeat,"
The chosen people, who live across the street,
Having babies and working for a living.
The law requires a medical examination before execution:
The law of self-preservation, which doesn't exist,
If we can commit suicide and live to regret it.

The terror of transgressing angels, looking homeward,
Is ours, because there's no one else to blame.
We are the chosen people, choosing to laugh
At a practical joke that isn't all that funny.
The Appian Way is now Highway 7, and Icarus
In his plane need fear no more the heat of the sun
As he flies, fatherless, midway between heaven
And no place: a suicide who lived to regret it.

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*William Logan*

## The Imitative Fallacy

So complete, the imago of consciousness,

the mosquito's predatory whine
beauties itself in the clothing of childhood.
Most desire the trivial duplications,

fond schemes staring across the mattress,
grammatical children whose dependent clauses
inscribe the arc of closure. What Jamesian

revelry attaches to the intimate contrivances
events wrap themselves in, to deceive?
Blood carves its woodwork in the house of the family,

the father's sins insinuate the child's fancy,
sour oaths refuse the legal trusts.
The lizard's slow scrawl across the screen

autographs the mansion to its heirs
whose soft skin textures oak interiors.
Each child can find his father there,

the mirror's parsimonious eye
answering the spiral of its own engendering,
parent fathering parent in the incestuous

thrill of will and testament. These sheetrock
marbles testify to husbandry
in the aesthetics of regard. What inherits

is less desire than distrust, raw material
whose survival choired false successions.
It must have seemed a kind of living

could be made from alabaster.

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*Christopher Logue*

## Walking

When I was green,
Green as the light beneath these leaves,
I used to say:
*Today I will be sad.*
*Too bad for anyone who disbelieves*
*That I am sad today.*
Green as the light beneath these leaves,
*How sad I am . . .*
I used to say.

No longer green,
Cool as the light between the rain,
I want to say:
*Sadness has come to stay.*
*It is my middle name . . .* but I refrain,
And going on my way,
Cool as the light between the rain,
I say: "Good-day . . .
Good-day . . ."

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*James Merrill*

## A Room at the Heart of Things

Two rooms, rather, one flight up, half-seen
Through the gilt palm fronds of rue Messaline.

Sparse furnishings: work table, lamp, two chairs,
Double bed, water closet, fourteen stairs;

Six windows, breathing spaces in the plot,
Between its couplets, to enjoy or not.

A poster—Carnival's white eyeless faces.
The ceiling fan. The floor the actor paces

From room to room, getting by heart the lines
Of boards washed ruddier as day declines,

Of fate upon the palm slapped to his brow,
Of verse the instant they are written (*now*)—

His shadow anyman's, chalk walls a trite
Incognito the world will penetrate.

*

The role he studies—a Young Man in Love—
Calls upon self and the eclipse thereof

By second nature. Evenings, dazed from sun,
Earth buries her worn faces one by one

Deeper in fleecy quilts, dusk atmospheres,
Then high-up quivering Hesperus appears—

Just so the actor, deep in middle age,
Assumes a youth till now unknown. On stage

Within a stanza to be somehow first
Turned inside out and only then rehearsed,

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It's this one's pen he seizes, and lamplit
Page he corrects. Soon he may read from it

Tonight's draft of the curtain line (Act II):
"Light of my life, I've made a play for you!"

*

Reduce, said Malraux, to the minimum
In every man the actor. Brave bonhomme,

Coming from him—! Beret and cigarette,
The world-wide field-reporter style was set

By how he posed, key witness to his time,
Questions of moment, face a paradigm.

We plain folk who believed what we were told
Had seen our crops burnt and our wives grown old

In one same night. Malraux no doubt took note,
As all who could read, would. Neat, was it not?

Life game the palm—much the way God once did—
For "living biographically" amid

Famines, uprisings, blood baths, hand to heart,
Saved by a weakness for performance art.

*

Those ivory towers were bric-a-brac. One flight
Of wooden steps, one slapdash coat of white,

Sets the room hovering like a UFO
Among tree-tops. Attracted by the glow,

Moth hallucinates and cat outstares
The glamor of dimensions never theirs.

Its tenant treads a measure, lights a joint,
Drawing perspective to the vanishing point

Inside his head. Here vows endure beyond
Earshot of lovers who dissolved their bond;

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Whitewash keeps faith with tenements of dew
Already atomized to midnight blue;

And Gravity's mask floats—at Phase XV
Oblivion-bright—above the stolen scene.

*

Actor and lover contemplate the act
So-called of darkness: touch that wrestles tact,

Bedsprings whose babble drowns the hearing, sight
That lids itself, gone underground. Torchlight

Gliding down narrow, redly glimmering veins,
Cell by cell the celebrant attains

A chamber where arcane translucences
Of god-as-mortal bring him to his knees.

Words, words. Yet these and others (to be "tarred"
And "set alight" crosswise by "Nero's guard")

Choreograph the passage from complex
Clairvoyance to some ultimate blind X,

Raw luster, rendering its human guise.
The lover shuts, the actor lifts his eyes.

*

By twos at moonset, palm trees, up from seeds
Big as a child's heart, whisper their asides—

Glittery, fanlike, alternating, slow
Pointers in the art of how to grow!

They have not relished being strewn before
Earth-shaking figures, Christ or Emperor.

Profoundly unideological
Wells of live shadow, they are no less tall

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Pillars of strength when—every twenty-six
Millenia, say—their namesake the Phoenix

Comes home to die. (Stylite and columnist
Foretell the early kindling of that nest

—Whence this rustle, this expectant stir?)
The actor robed as priest or bird-catcher

*

Steps forth. The room at heart is small, he smiles,
But to the point. Innumerable aisles

Converge upon its theater-in-the-round's
Revolving choirs and footlit stamping grounds.

Only far out, where the circumference
Grazes the void, does act approach nonsense

And sense itself—seats cramped, sightlines askew—
Matter not a speck. Out there the *You*

And *I*, diffracted by the moiré grid,
Have yet to meet (or waffled when they did!),

But here, made room for, bare hypothesis
—Through swordplay or soliloquy or kiss

Emitting speed-of-light particulars—
Proves itself in the bright way of stars.

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*Howard Nemerov*

## The War in the Air

For a saving grace, we didn't see our dead,
Who rarely bothered coming home to die
But simply stayed away out there
In the clean war, the war in the air.

Seldom the ghosts came back bearing their tales
Of hitting the earth, the incompressible sea,
But stayed up there in the relative wind,
Shades fading in the mind,

Who had no graves but only epitaphs
Where never so many spoke for never so few:
*Per ardua*, said the partisans of Mars,
*Per aspera*, to the stars.

That was the good war, the war we won
As if there were no death, for goodness' sake,
With the help of the losers we left out there
In the air, in the empty air.

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*Sharon Olds*

## This Hour

You could never really say what it is like,
this hour of drinking wine together
on a hot summer night, in the living room
with the windows open, in our underwear, a
few distant tower rooms looking
down into our window, my nylon bra
gleaming faintly in the heat, my bikini
panties with tiny pale-gold
gibbon monkeys on them . . . We talk about
leaving our son at camp, how finally he
disappeared among the pine boughs, we
could not tell what was amber bough and trans-
lucent beetle chrysalis and
what was the body of our love. The wine is
powerful, with a strong body that
fits itself into my mouth but keeps its
lake-pebble shape, wine so gold it
almost has some amber in it,
silky resin like the sweets I sipped from my
father's forehead the hour before his death, the
sweat of his life. We talk about his
last days, how we were waiting for him to die.
You are lying on the couch, your underpants a
luminous white, your hand resting
relaxed along the side of your penis, we
talk about your father's illness, your
nipple like a perfect dark
circle risen to the surface of your chest.
Even if we wanted to
we could not describe it,
the end of the second glass when I begin to

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weep and you start to get sleepy — I love to
drink and weep with you and end up
sobbing to a sleeping man, your
long body filling the couch and
draped slightly over the ends, the
untrained soft singing of your snore, it cannot be given.
Yes we know we will make love but we're
not getting ready to make love
nor are we getting over making love,
love is simply our element, it is the
humid summer night, we are in it.

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*Ron Padgett*

## To Woody Woodpecker

I love you, Woody,
when you peck
on the head
of a bad person
and laugh and fly
away real fast,
speed lines
in the air
and clouds of invisible
dust dissipating,
I love the way
you last only seven minutes:
never boring!
The heart has seven minutes
with Woody Woodpecker,
seven minutes of pure bliss.

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*Molly Peacock*

## A Hot Day in Agrigento

Temples look like discarded alphabets.
We loved lying in their shadows lazily
deciphering and resting and laying bets

on what they really were for. Easily
caught by fantasy, we no longer cared
why they were there, just *that* they were. Happy

to sit down and drink the water we shared
(having lugged our plastic bottle, and hats,
and camera, through the human dung bared

right there in the sun — where else could you get
relief with no toilets?) we guzzled it down
and rubbed it on our arms, hands, legs, and necks.

A girl in dirty, expensive clothes found
us with the bottle and asked us for some.
I said no. As she left, a gagging smell wound

its way from the bottle's damp lung.
I've often been asked to give what I've saved,
but under the temple I said no, numbed

against the girl, like one of those bridesmaids
who kept her oil in the Bible story
and was safe for the night. I'd hated those maids

until I became one in my story,
the shape of the character I'd searched for
surprising me as the temples did: See

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how golden but pocked they've become, nor
are they quite decipherable any more,
at least to those who forget what they're for,

which is worship, the greed of prayer.
"So that's who you are," my friend said. "Thirsty?"
With him I drank, not quite the maid in the story.

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*Robert Pinsky*

## Lament for the Makers

What if I told you the truth? What if I could?
The nuptial trek of the bower apes in May:
At night in the mountain meadow their clucking cries,

The reeking sulphur springs called Smoking Water,
Their skimpy ramparts of branches, pebbles and vines—
So slightly better than life, that snarl of weeds,

The small town bank by comparison is Rome,
With its four-faced bronze clock that chimes the hours,
The six great pillars surmounted by a frieze

Of Cronus eating his children—or trying to,
But one child bests him because we crave to live,
And if that too means dying then to die

Like Arthur when ladies take him in his barge
Across the misty water: better than life,
Or better than truly dying. In the movies

Smoking and driving are better, a city walk.
Grit on the sidewalk after a thaw, mild air.
I took the steps along the old stone trestle

Above the station, to the part of town
I never knew, old houses flush to the street
Curving uphill. Patches of ice in the shade.

What if I found an enormous secret there
And told you? We would still feel something next
Or even at the same time. Just as now. In Brooklyn,

Among the diamond cutters at their benches
Under high Palladian windows full of a storm,
One wearing headphones listens to the Talmud.

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What if he happens to feel some saw or maxim
Inwardly? Then the young girl in her helmet,
An allegorical figure called The Present,

Would mime for us the action of coming to life:
A crease of shadow across her face, a cross,
And through the window, washing stumps of brick,

Exuberant streaks and flashes—literal lightning
Spilling out into a cheery violent rain.
Worship is tautological, with its Blessed

Art thou O Lord who consecrates the Sabbath
Unto us that we may praise it in thy name
Who blesses us with this thy holy day

That we may hallow it unto thy holy blessings . . .
And then the sudden curt command or truth:
God told him, Thou shalt cut thy foreskin off.

Then Abraham was better than life. The monster
Is better when he startles us. Hurt is vivid,
Sincerity visible in the self-inflicted wound.

Paws bleeding from their terrible climb, they weave
Garlands of mountain creeper for their bed.
The circle of desire, that aches to play

Or sings to hear the song passing. We sense
How much we might yet make things change, renewed
As when the lovers rise from their bed of play

And dress for supper and from a lewd embrace
Undress again. Weeds mottle the fissured pavement
Of the playground in a net of tufted lines

As sunset drenches a cinematic honey
Over the stucco terraces, copper and blue,
And the lone player cocks wrist and ball behind

His ear and studies the rusty rim again.
The half-ruined city around him throbs and glows
With pangs of allure that flash like the names of bars

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Along San Pablo Avenue: Tee Tee's Lounge,
The Mallard Club, Quick's Little Alaska, Ruthie's,
Chiquita's, and inside the sweet still air

Of tobacco, malt and lime, and in some music
But in others only voices or even quiet,
And the player's arm pauses and pumps again.

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*Katha Pollitt*

## The White Room

Possible to believe in a bearable sort of life
in a white room in one of the tidy anonymous streets
that flash by the elevated subway. Picture it:
a blue chair for reading, a gas ring
for coffee, the lamp in its cheap shade
casting its circle of light. Outside,
soot sifts down on the cornflowers in the vacant lot,
the tailor goes down to the corner for the paper,
the sandwich man stands in his doorway
listening to the Saturday opera on the radio.
You pass and exchange grave nods
with your neighbors, fellow anchorites
proud in your way to have chosen for discipline
a solitude you tell yourself
you probably would have come to anyway.

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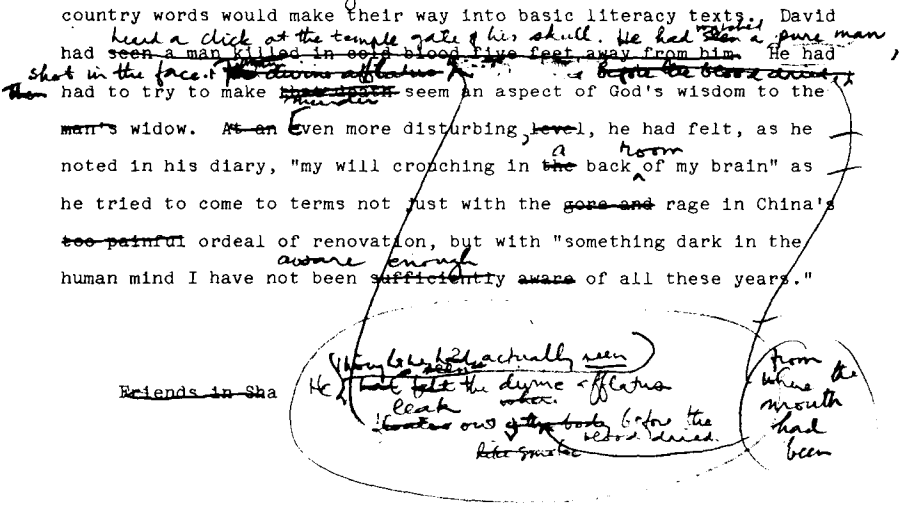
CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

The Election to Stay

1

"Prayer is not helping me enough," he wrote in his diary.

He was finding the return to "normalcy"--his rounds of the villages on the saddle of his Indian--hard to adjust to. "It's as if I had different colored glasses on from before." It was hard now to feel that the most important issue in life was which handful of country words would make their way into basic literacy texts. David had seen a man killed in cold blood five feet away from him. He had had to try to make meaning seem an aspect of God's wisdom to the man's widow. At an even more disturbing level, he had felt, as he noted in his diary, "my will crouching in the back of my brain" as he tried to come to terms not just with the gore and rage in China's too painful ordeal of renovation, but with "something dark in the human mind I have not been sufficiently aware of all these years."



*A manuscript page from John Hersey's most recent novel,* The Call.

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# The Art of Fiction XCII
# John Hersey

*John Hersey moves with rare facility between the worlds of fiction and journalism, yet he is vigorous in his defense of the rules which separate the two. He was born in 1914 in Tientsin, China, the son of a Protestant missionary. He attended Hotchkiss and Yale, and studied for a year at Clare College, Cambridge, on a Mellon Fellowship; after returning from England, he worked for a summer as private secretary to Sinclair Lewis. He worked for several years at* Time *magazine, first as a staff writer and later as a war correspondent in the South Pacific, China, Japan, North Africa and elsewhere. His first*

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*novel,* A Bell for Adano, *won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945; but he is perhaps best known for the book which followed that one.* Hiroshima, *a nonfiction account of the first use of the atomic bomb, first appeared as an entire issue of* The New Yorker *in 1946. Reproduced in newspapers and read over radio stations throughout the world, it was a social and a literary sensation; in its paperback edition, it remains one of the best-selling books of all time. Since then, Hersey has written twelve novels—among them* The Wall *(1950),* A Single Pebble *(1956),* The War Lover *(1959),* The Child Buyer *(1960),* Too Far to Walk *(1966),* Under The Eye of the Storm *(1967), and* My Petition For More Space *(1974)—and five works of non-fiction, including* The Algiers Motel Incident *(1968),* Letter to the Alumni *(1970), and* The Writer's Craft *(1974). His most recent work is* The Call *(1985), a novel which traces the life of a Protestant missionary in China in the first half of this century.*

*Early in his career—"before," he says, "I was really even a writer"—Hersey decided to restrict his public expression to the medium in which he was most comfortable; that is, to the written rather than the spoken word. He has kept to his decision. This is only the second interview he has ever granted; the first was with* Publisher's Weekly *in 1984.*

*Since retiring from his professorship at Yale two years ago, Hersey and his wife Barbara have divided their time between homes in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and Key West, Florida. I visited them shortly before their annual move south, in typical autumn weather on the island—clear, bright, and unexpectedly cold. He and I talked on a glassed-in porch, carpeted and comfortably furnished, which afforded a spectacular view across Vineyard Haven Harbor; his study, directly upstairs from where we sat, offers the same lovely distraction. The ferry which runs to and from the mainland passes in front of those windows, its horn blasting, every half hour or so. Also visible, moored just offshore, is the small gray boat aboard which Hersey frequently goes fishing and does what he calls his "back-of-the-head work."*

*The Herseys were extremely hospitable during my three-day stay; but in the four-odd hours when the tape recorder was run-*

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*ning, there was no small talk and no break. Unused to, and a little distrustful of, the process, he clearly felt it demanded his full concentration. He spoke very slowly, and paused frequently, looking out across the water as if trying to envision his words upon a page before releasing them. The house was absolutely silent; we were never interrupted, most likely by design.*

INTERVIEWER

How long did you live in China?

JOHN HERSEY

I was eleven when we left China. My father contracted encephalitis on a trip into the back country on famine relief work; that turned out to have a sequel of Parkinson's disease, and he had to retire. So we came home in 1925.

INTERVIEWER

Was that the first time you had ever been to America?

HERSEY

No, most missionaries got furloughs every seven years, and an earlier furlough of my father's coincided with the First World War. When I was three, my father was assigned by the YMCA to go to France to help with the Chinese Labor Corps. There were nearly two hundred thousand Chinese coolies who were taken to France to dig trenches and unload ships and relieve troops from the front. While he was there, my mother and my two brothers and I came to this country. We lived in Montclair, New Jersey, for a little more than a year. It was a segment of my life so different from the childhood I had known, and subsequently knew, that I do have some odd visual memories of Montclair—for instance, of finding some old newspapers in the attic of the house we were renting and taking them out to sell to various neighbors. A few sharp pictures stay in my mind. And then in 1919 we joined my father and went back to China, around the world the rest of the way.

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INTERVIEWER

What sort of schooling did an American child in China receive?

HERSEY

I went first to a British grammar school which was right next door to us. It was run on old-fashioned English lines. The headmaster was a strict character who had a whip in his office, used on bad boys, which we were all quite aware of. On the other hand, there was a motive to learn and to do well there; my oldest brother went right through that school, and his name was carved in wood up on the wall, in the inscriptions of honors winners there, for me to look at and think about. I was only in that school for a couple of grades. After that I went to a new American school, which had only about thirty students. That school got me started on languages—we studied French in the early grades—and on an early interest in music; I remember we had opera records played to us. I played the violin then. My father, when he was with the coolie corps in France, had bought a three-quarter-size violin. He found a White Russian refugee in the city who was a violinist, and Paul Federovsky gave me lessons. He later came to this country and played with the Boston Symphony for the rest of his life. In later years I used to go and see him frequently, after his concerts. And he never forgave me for giving up the violin in favor of writing, which he said anybody could do. He was a very gifted man, and in those China years he excited me enough to make me think I wanted to be a concert violinist. There was a period before I went to college when I practiced four to six hours a day; I was serious about it. I gave it up in college, making a choice between that and writing, and I haven't dared to touch the violin since then. My son Baird gave me one for Christmas about eight or ten years ago, and I never opened the case.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the kind of formative reading you did, both in and out of school, was any different than it might have been had you grown up in America?

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HERSEY

It may have been, I suppose. There was a certain amount of reading that many American boys would have done: Ernest Thompson Seton, the Terhune books. Animal stories of one kind or another, I remember I loved. There were also some semi-inspirational things—Lamb's essays, books about mythological heroes—the common currency of that sort of world; I guess those things pushed me eventually toward other kinds of reading, about heroes or their equivalents, in works by writers I came to admire later on, Malraux and Silone. Much of my early reading was commonplace. My father was a shy, studious, contemplative man, and I spent a lot of time in his study in our house in China. I was into *The Book of Knowledge* all the time, and later the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I was allowed to play, I guess you would say, on his typewriter at a very early age. My mother kept scrapbooks of everything any of her children did all their lives, and among my scrapbooks are newspapers that I wrote on the typewriter at the age of six, The Hersey Family News, with ads offering my older brothers for various kinds of hard labor at very low wages.

INTERVIEWER

You mention in *The Algiers Motel Incident* that there was a class system in China of which you were always aware . . .

HERSEY

It was my natural world, and I can't say I consciously questioned that world, though I did have feelings of dislocation and discomfort every once in a while. It was a world in which I was a foreigner, a member of a minority, but the dominant minority. We lived in the British Concession, where the Chinese were not supposed to live, though some wealthy Chinese rented houses from foreigners there—some who had been thrown out of the government, perhaps some who were afraid of being beheaded if they were at large, and some who just liked the idea of luxuries, living like foreigners. I rode to school in a rickshaw, paid a human being very few coppers for pulling me there, and sometimes when I was feeling lazy I would ride home from

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school, too, and get the coppers from the cook's bag in the kitchen. We had three servants—cook, number one boy, and coolie, in that order—though my father was paid very little, something like $200 a month. Even considering how much more valuable dollars were then, by American standards we were poor. Yet there we lived in a rather fine two-story house, with servants' quarters. As I say, that was my natural habitat, so I didn't really question much of it at the time. Though beggars in the streets, and some of the coolies who were beasts of burden in the British concession, did trouble me. I remember once going home from school, I came on a water cart—water was brought from the river to sprinkle on the dusty streets to keep dust down so the foreigners wouldn't be troubled by it. It was a terrifically heavy burden when a two-wheeled wooden cart, with a rectangular cask of probably ten cubic feet, was filled with water. A coolie had stopped his cart, that day, propped the shafts up with a stick. I had never seen the inside of one of these things, and was barely tall enough to look over the edge; I reached up and grabbed one side to take a look, and upset the cart. The water spilled, and the coolie's labor of hauling it all the way there from the river was lost. He was not supposed to shout at a white child, but I understood why he did. His rage at me was something I have never forgotten.

INTERVIEWER

Did that system change the way you looked at American society?

HERSEY

I've considered myself a foreigner all my life, in ways. I was born a foreigner. I grew up bilingual; no matter that my spoken Chinese was that of an eleven-year-old—it was native to the ear. When we came back to this country, the ambiance here was so different from the one I had grown up in that from late boyhood until, say, college, I felt I was a little different. Those early years got me somewhat in the habit of thinking of myself not exactly as an outsider but as someone who came from another culture. I think that's affected my adult years, though

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I feel very much an American now. Still, my prevailing interest has been in the world as a whole, and in the place of a person in a larger setting than one defined by national boundaries.

INTERVIEWER

It must really have seemed another world to go from China to Hotchkiss and Yale.

HERSEY

I went first to a local high school in Briarcliff Manor, New York, for two years. Hotchkiss had taken in a number of missionaries' sons; I was admitted there on a scholarship. The scholarship boys cleaned classrooms, waited on tables, and were in one sense in a separate social class. But that seemed to me to be perfectly normal; in fact, in ways I saw it as an advantage. Waiting on tables, you were at the nerve center of gossip and understanding—you knew everybody, what they were like, what they were about. I didn't feel that the work was demeaning in the least. A great teacher in my life was the headmaster of the school, George van Santvoord, a man of enormous erudition. Van Santvoord was an eccentric, and a model of great value in a school that might have seemed to build pressure for conformity. Quite the contrary, he encouraged dissent and independence. He had a crude Socratic method of his own; he used to sneak up on you in the school corridor when you were talking freely and foolishly with other boys, and you'd feel his hand come into the crook of your elbow, and then he would ask you an odd question. The first question he asked me, when I was a homesick child at the very beginning of my stay there, was, "What was Stradivarius' first name?" I didn't know. The second question, some days later, was, "Is it true that eeny, meeny, miney moe is counting in Chinese?" I knew that it wasn't, and I counted to him correctly in Chinese, and that gave me a great boost. What I didn't realize at the time, though I do now, was that he had known both that I played the violin and that I had been born in China. He had given me an identity by asking me these questions, something I very badly needed at that point.

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INTERVIEWER

Were the violin and writing already competing when you were there?

HERSEY

Yes, to some degree. There were teachers there who started me thinking about writing. One was Gordon Haight, who would later become the world's leading authority on George Eliot. Another, a teacher named John McChesney, an eccentric like the headmaster, got me at a period when I was wasting my eyes on Galsworthy and put *The Sound and The Fury* in my hands—this was in 1930, when Faulkner was so far relatively unknown. I did play the violin; I played in a string quartet with, among others, John Hammond, who was later a catalyst in introducing black jazz musicians to the recording world—the patron saint of recorded jazz of the thirties and forties.

INTERVIEWER

How did you wind up working for Sinclair Lewis? It seems an unusual first job.

HERSEY

I had applied for a job at *Time* magazine; my brother roomed with Henry Luce's brother Sheldon at Hotchkiss, and that gave me an opening. Luce promised me a job after graduation, but then I was offered a Mellon Fellowship to Clare College, Cambridge, and I decided to take it; I asked Luce if I could still have the job when I got back. He said I could. When I did get back, though, he seemed to have forgotten his promise. So I applied for a job in the regular way; I was given something called a *Time* Test, which consisted of their handing you all the research a writer would have writing a *Time* story, and asking you to write what you thought would be the appropriate story based on the material. I took the test, and after that could never get past a certain Miss Schultz, secretary to a man named C. D. Jackson, who was an assistant to Luce. So I began looking elsewhere. I heard about the job for Sinclair Lewis through a friend who worked at the *Herald Tribune*, and applied for it, and

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worked for him for several months, beginning in the late summer of 1937.

INTERVIEWER

What did the job entail?

HERSEY

He had just finished a novel called *The Prodigal Parents*, and my first job was to read the manuscript and tell him what I thought of it. The novel was about the relationship between some parents and their college kids. It wasn't very good, but I didn't have the courage to do anything but correct him on some lapses in student slang. Mainly, though, I took dictation and retyped his work. It was a wonderful summer for me. I didn't know at the time that he had been a heavy drinker. The reason I got the job at all was because he had gone off on a tear with a man named Florey, then his factotum, and the pair had disappeared; Lewis's wife, Dorothy Thompson, who wrote for the *Herald Tribune*, began calling inns all along the coast, thinking he would have wandered off that way somewhere. She finally called one in Old Lyme, I believe, where he was in the throes of delirium tremens. She went and got him, and, finding that Florey had been drinking with him, she fired Florey. So Lewis needed someone. I called him, and he invited me to come up to the Essex House on Central Park South, where he was staying. We talked for a while about Yale, and about the American Legion, which was having a convention in New York at the time, one thing and another, and then he suddenly said, "Excuse me, I have something else I have to do." And I thought oh, that went badly, and went back to reading *Gone With The Wind*, which I was in at the moment. But he called me the next morning and asked me to come up. This time he talked about being married to a columnist, about women in general, again one thing and another, and again dismissed me. He called me the *next* morning. As we were talking, the phone kept ringing; it was clear he didn't like the phone. He came back from one call, and said, "John"—by this time he was calling me by my first name—"there's a young man downstairs in the

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lobby who's applying for a job as my secretary. I have to shave and change, do you mind interviewing him for me?" That was the signal that I had been hired—being asked to interview someone applying for the job I thought I was applying for. I was able to tell Lewis that the young man was a good stenographer but I didn't think he'd really work for him. Lewis gave me a month to learn Gregg shorthand, and to convert from hunt-and-peck to the touch system in typing. And then I took my first dictation from him.

INTERVIEWER

Was he a model for you in any way?

HERSEY

He was past his important work—this was a couple of years after *It Can't Happen Here*. But he was wonderfully important to me; I was able to see the life of a man totally given over to writing. Even though he was not producing important novels anymore, he was so gripped by what he was doing that it was very impressive to me. He would get up in the middle of the night, cook up some coffee, and work for two or three hours and then go back to bed. He led an irregular life, but a life that was passionately devoted to his work. I was exposed to someone who lived for writing, lived *in* his writing, in a way. That summer he became interested in theater, and was writing what turned out to be a very bad play about a mythical Balkan kingdom. He wanted to learn everything about the theater. There was a summer-stock company in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where we were, and every night he would have the casts over to his house. He was like a student trying to learn fundamentals; he would ask them how you get people on stage and off stage. His utter whole-heartedness was an important example for me.

INTERVIEWER

He must also have been an example of the darker side of the writer's life.

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HERSEY

Yes, he was a very troubled man. He was on the wagon then, and wanted to be in Stockbridge in order to be near the Riggs sanitarium. He wasn't under treatment, but he felt safe being near the psychiatrists, in case he tumbled. He was haunted in ways, it was clear; at the same time, he wanted to please, he was very entertaining and outgoing, and he compensated for some of his dread and pain, I think, by being charming. I have gathered that it was another story when he was drinking; I understand—though I never saw him that way—that he could be nasty when he was tight. But he was wonderful the summer I was working for him. When he moved back to New York, after several months up there, he didn't need me as much as he had in the country, and he encouraged me to leave him and make a million dollars, so as to be free to write whatever I wanted. With a war brewing, he thought making toy soldiers would be profitable, and he sent me to F.A.O. Schwartz and other stores to study their lead-soldier lines. But I decided I had no gift for money-making—an insight the years have confirmed—and I chose to try *Time* again. I took the *Time* Test again, and this time, having been nettled by what had happened before, I wrote a piece that was as far from *Time*'s style as I could make it be. I wrote a twenty-four page essay on how rotten *Time* was.

INTERVIEWER

That one got past Miss Schultz?

HERSEY

I was hired the next day. My first job was as writer for Milestones, Miscellany, People and Animals, four different columns, each of which now, I assume, would be the work of at least three people. Thirty-five dollars a week, and hard work. *Time* was in an interesting phase; an editor named Tom Matthews had gathered a brilliant group of writers, including James Agee, Robert Fitzgerald, Whittaker Chambers, Robert Cantwell, Louis Kronenberger, and Calvin Fixx—the father of the avatar of jogging who died jogging. They were dazzling. *Time*'s style was

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still very hokey—"backward ran sentences til reeled the mind"—but I could tell, even as a neophyte, who had written each of the pieces in the magazine, because each of these writers had such a distinctive voice. Working for the magazine was, I think, a valuable training because it taught me the importance of what's left out. There were absurd tasks sometimes—very complex and important issues having to be dealt with in two hundred words, so that often you were forced in a way to cheat and lie in order to compress as much as you had to. In the end I differed with Luce on a number of things, in particular his China policy. But on the whole, the training in tightness and concision was something I've come, in retrospect, to value. I also made some friendships that have been important to me over the years. Robert Fitzgerald was a close friend up until his death last year.

INTERVIEWER

But you stayed at *Time* long enough to be a correspondent for much of World War II.

HERSEY

I went first to China in 1939 and then to the South Pacific after the war began, as a war correspondent with the Navy on the aircraft carrier *Hornet.* Then on Guadalcanal. And later in North Africa and Sicily, and Russia. I did some writing for *Life* then as well.

INTERVIEWER

Somewhere in the midst of all that traveling, you managed to find time to write a first novel.

HERSEY

My first book was about MacArthur; I came to dislike it a lot, and asked Knopf, my publisher, to take it out of print in the early years. Then I wrote a book called *Into the Valley* about the Guadalcanal campaign, and it was after that, when I went to North Africa and Sicily, that I got the material for *A Bell for Adano.* I outlined the book and drafted a few possible pages of it in Sicily and North Africa. Then I came home and had

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a vacation from *Time* for a month, and I wrote the novel on that vacation.

INTERVIEWER

In a month?

HERSEY

Yeah. It was written in a sort of white heat.

INTERVIEWER

Was it that natural a move, to go from writing nonfiction to writing fiction?

HERSEY

I guess I'd been thinking from the very beginning, and had been experimenting a little bit in the pieces I did for *Life*, with the notion that journalism could be enlivened by using the devices of fiction. My principal reading all along had been in fiction, even though I was working for *Time* on fact pieces. As I said, Malraux, Silone, John Dos Passos of those years, Hemingway, Faulkner, were all writers who had excited me; the kind of skepticism and challenging of the norms that Van Santvoord had put to me had attracted me to writers who were trying to break the molds in various ways. In Sicily I wrote some *Life* pieces about people there who interested me very much. I couldn't take their stories in nonfiction beyond the articles I had written; but implicit in what they were like was the possibility of a novel. So I just plunged in. The book almost wrote itself. I was working under pressure of time—I had a month in which to work. I now look back on it as a naive book, and an imperfect one. But the example of Silone, who spent his last years rewriting his novels, has cautioned me against trying to repair *A Bell for Adano*, to make it better. Silone went around a long curve from left to right, and I think he wanted to take the political errors of his youth out of his early books. But instead he took his youthfulness out of them, and I think damaged them badly. As did Fitzgerald when he tried to straighten out *Tender Is The Night*. *A Bell for Adano*, as I see it now, had a

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value when it came out, flawed as it is, because it presented to the American public, at a time when the war was far from won, the spectacle of an American general who seemed to represent the very things we were fighting against—General Marvin, loosely based on Patton, who was I think rather seriously deranged during the Sicilian campaign.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you lose the manuscript to the novel at one point?

HERSEY

I had flown back from Europe with a colonel—I've forgotten his name, but let's say it was Wilcox—and I rode in a taxi with him from the airport. I had been in two airplane accidents my last few days in Sicily; one plane crashed when it landed in a bomb crater in the Licata airport, and shortly after takeoff the other ran into the anchoring cable of a barrage balloon, which had inadvertently been put up by the Navy in the takeoff path of the Army field the night before. I had a little Olivetti typewriter which had been badly bent up, and I was bringing it home as a souvenir of the accidents. I was fortunately not very badly bent up myself. I had tucked my draft chapters, and the outline I wanted to follow, in the case of the typewriter. When we got into New York I was so excited about getting home that I left the typewriter in the taxi with Colonel Wilcox. He went on, and I realized of course right after I'd gotten out of the taxi that my work was lost. I called the Pentagon and got a very friendly lady who said she would be willing to look up the Wilcoxes; she found there was one who came from New London and was indeed on leave, and she gave me his address. I called the telephone company and asked for the phone at that address. I rang the number. There was no answer. The telephone information operator, who had stayed on the line, was a wonder. She said, well, I'll get the number of the people across the street. I called *them* and they said yes, they'd heard that Colonel Wilcox was coming on leave but he wasn't home yet, they thought he was going to be there in a few days. So I waited a few days. I called him, and he said yeah, he'd taken that thing

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in with him, he was supposed to meet his wife in the Commodore Hotel, and she was an hour late. He was so mad that when she came, he got up and walked out and left the typewriter there. I called the Commodore Hotel and they said yeah, it's here in Lost and Found, come and get it.

INTERVIEWER

How did you hear that the book had won the Pulitzer Prize?

HERSEY

On the tennis court. I was playing tennis with a friend of mine named Richard Lauterbach, who later died of polio; he was then working for *Life*. We were at Rip's Tennis Courts on 54th Street and Sutton Place. And Rip or his assistant came out of his shed onto the court and said, "I just heard on the radio that you won the Pulitzer Prize." And I said, "Lauterbach, you bastard, you're trying to pull a fast one on me. I know it!" We went on and played the rest of the set, then I went home and found out that it was true. That also happened to be V-E Day, as it turned out.

INTERVIEWER

Were you still at *Time* when all this was going on?

HERSEY

No, I had left *Time* by then and had gone up to work for *Life*. I went to China and Japan a few months after that on an odd assignment for *Life* and *The New Yorker*—two magazines that hated each other. But I made separate arrangements with them to do a given number of articles for each one.

INTERVIEWER

Was that the trip on which you interviewed the subjects for *Hiroshima*?

HERSEY

Yes. I went to China first and did several pieces there, and then went from there to Japan, did the research for that piece,

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came home and wrote it. It was published in *The New Yorker* in August of 1946.

INTERVIEWER

Was that why you went to Japan—with the intention of doing that particular story?

HERSEY

Yes. Before I went on the trip I had lunch with William Shawn, who was then the number two to Harold Ross on *The New Yorker*, and we talked about various possible stories. One that we thought about was a piece on Hiroshima. At that point, what seemed impressive was the power of the bomb, and almost all the reporting had had to do with the devastation it had caused, the physical devastation; it was really in terms of the destructive power of the bomb that Shawn and I envisioned the story. But as I thought about it in advance, while I was working in China, I thought more and more that I wanted to try to do something about the impact on people rather than on buildings, on the physical city. One of the assignments I worked on for *The New Yorker* involved a trip on the LST—a Landing Ship for Tanks—which was transporting Chinese troops from Shanghai to the north to fight against the Communists. I was horrified on that trip by the way the American naval officers treated the Chinese. This reaction may have been some kind of reverberation from the sense of dislocation I'd had as a child in China, I suppose. Anyhow, I was very upset and feverish by the end of the voyage, I thought from anger, but it turned out I had a mild case of the flu. I was taken on a destroyer from there back down to Shanghai. Some crew members brought me books from their library, one of which was *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder. Reading that, I sensed the possibility of a form for the Hiroshima piece. The book is about five people who were killed when a rope suspension bridge over a canyon in Peru gave way, and how they had happened to find their way to that moment of fate together. That seemed to me to be a possible way of dealing with this very complex story of Hiroshima; to take a number of people—half a dozen, as

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it turned out in the end—whose paths crossed each other and came to this moment of shared disaster. So I went to Hiroshima and began right away looking for the kinds of people who would fit into that pattern. I went first to some German priests, because I'd read a report to the Holy See on the bombing by a German Jesuit who had been there. One of the priests—Father Kleinsorge, about whom I wrote in the Hiroshima piece in the end—spoke some English, and he began to introduce me to others. Through him I met the Protestant minister, Tanimoto, who spoke very good English, having studied at Emory University before the war. And both of them then introduced me to still others. I must have talked to forty or fifty people, trying to find the ones that would work for what I wanted to do. I narrowed it down to the six I finally wrote about, and got their stories. I spent about three weeks doing that, and came home and wrote it, in about a month, I guess.

INTERVIEWER

Was this designed from the beginning to be a piece which would take up a whole issue of *The New Yorker*?

HERSEY

It was originally intended as four separate pieces to be run in four successive weeks. One of the problems in handling it serially was that of giving enough clues in the second installment about what had happened in the first so that the reader who hadn't read the first would be able to pick up on it. But not so much as to stop someone who *had* read the first from wanting to read the second. That difficulty led Shawn finally one day to say, "Look, we just can't, we'll have to do this all in one week." He took the idea to Ross, who a few days later called me and said that he wanted to give an entire issue to the account. So we then went back and untangled it all—made it consecutive, for one issue.

INTERVIEWER

Was the Wilder book a model in terms of style as well? That flat style that characterizes *Hiroshima*?

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HERSEY

Not really. Wilder's was a much more ornate and meandering style than mine would be. My choice was to be deliberately quiet in the piece, because I thought that if the horror could be presented as directly as possible, it would allow the reader to identify with the characters in a direct way. I've thought quite a lot about the issue of fiction and journalism as two possible ways of presenting realities of life, particularly such harsh ones as we've encountered in my lifetime. Fiction is the more attractive to me, because if a novelist succeeds, he can enable the reader to identify with the characters of the story, to *become* the characters of the story, almost, in reading. Whereas in journalism, the writer is always mediating between the material and the reader; the reader is conscious of the journalist presenting material to him. This was one of the reasons why I had experimented with the devices of fiction in doing journalism, in the hopes that my mediation would, ideally, disappear. I believe that the reader is not conscious of the writer of fiction, except through the author's voice—that is, you are conscious of the person *behind* the work. But in journalism you are conscious of the person *in* the work, the person who's writing it and explaining to you what's taken place. So my hope was, by using the tricks and the ways of fiction, to be able to eliminate that mediation and have the reader directly confronted by the characters. In this case, my hope was that the reader would be able to become the characters enough to suffer some of the pain, some of the disaster, and therefore realize it.

INTERVIEWER

What were some of the tricks of fiction that you tried to employ?

HERSEY

Well, there's the whole issue of point of view, presenting each of the characters from its viewpoint. There are six points of view in the book, and each section devoted to Tanimoto, Miss Sasaki, Dr. Fujii, and so on, enters into each survivor's state of mind without representing his thoughts—it's all done in terms of

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action, of what happened to them, what they saw, heard, and did. The reader looks at what is happening through the eyes of each of these characters, as he would in reading through a point of view in fiction. Then there is the means of building suspense in fiction: the writer takes a given episode up to the verge of some kind of crisis, and then cuts away from it to another scene, making the reader want to get back to the first to learn the outcome. One of the other fictional elements in *Hiroshima*, I feel, is the way in which time is opened up. The first passages are very tight in time, and then time gradually pulls out as you go through the story, to a more—not to a casual pace, but to a pace which one hoped would open out into a sense of a long and terrible future—which has since indeed come to pass.

INTERVIEWER

What was the initial reaction to the piece at *The New Yorker*?

HERSEY

It was a very big step for them to devote the entire space to a single piece. This meant that they gave it wonderful editing. It was the first experience I had had with editing as careful as that. At *Life*, they had a lot of confidence in their writers, sometimes to the extent that—well, I know of articles I wrote for *Life* which no single editor read from beginning to end. On the Hiroshima piece, I must have spent ten hours a day for twenty days with Ross and Shawn on it. Ross's kind of editing was to put hundreds of questions in the margins of the proofs—the *New Yorker* puts things in galleys the minute they arrive, so the editors can see them as *New Yorker* pieces, I guess. Ross wrote many, many queries. A typical query of his was this: I had written of ruined bicycles near the epicenter of the bomb as "lopsided bicycles." Ross' query was "Can something which is two-dimensional be lopsided?" As Shawn and I came to this, we realized that Ross was right, it couldn't. That happened late one evening after we'd been working for hours, and so we both said, let's deal with that tomorrow morning. So I went home, thought about it, and decided that the only word I could use

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in place of "lopsided" would be "crumpled." Got in the next morning before Shawn; the galleys were on his desk and he'd written "crumpled" in the margin already. That was an example to me of the way he becomes the writer he's dealing with. I see Shawn as a kind of editorial Zelig; it's a wonderful gift he has, to be able to think in the vocabulary of the writer he's editing and to find a way of dealing with the text that's exactly appropriate to that person.

INTERVIEWER

Were you prepared for the reaction to the piece when it finally appeared?

HERSEY

The reaction was explosive, simply because this was such an unprecedented thing for the magazine to do; to have this heavy thing take up a whole issue of a magazine which normally carried lots of humor, cartoons, light pieces and so on. It caused a sensation. That's all been paraded in one way or another. It was broadcast over networks, and reproduced in a lot of newspapers, so it did get a lot of readers right on the spot. And has had a lot, over the years; I get letters all the time now from kids at school who are reading it, being exposed now. Now it has a different significance, because these are young people who are vaguely fearful of "the bomb" but have never had any way of imagining what that fear stood for.

INTERVIEWER

Was it something like that feeling, that a new generation has never known the bomb's effects, that led you to go back to Hiroshima recently, to write the book's new concluding chapter?

HERSEY

I had corresponded with Tanimoto over the years, and he had told me a little about what had happened to each of the other five people. It was quite clear that the shadow was longer than the one year about which I had written in the original

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piece. The shadow was much, much longer. So I thought there might be some value in going back to find out what had happened to the six over the time since 1946. Though these six people were by no means representative of a cross section of Hiroshima's population, the kinds of consequences of the bombing that they suffered were probably fairly true of the way the shadow fell on everyone.

INTERVIEWER

What evidence did you have that, as you say in the postscript's last sentence, "the world's memory . . . had grown spotty"?

HERSEY

Well, let me put it another way around to begin with. I think that what has kept the world safe from the bomb since 1945 has not been deterrence, in the sense of fear of specific weapons, so much as it's been memory. The memory of what happened at Hiroshima. I think that an argument can still be made that it would have been better to demonstrate the bomb somewhere else, rather than dropping it on a city. That might have brought an end to the war. Yet I wonder whether we might not have experienced another use of the bomb, since then, if there had been only a demonstration on a desert island. The demonstrations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were so powerful that we have been able, so far, to extrapolate from them what it would be like to have a much bigger bomb dropped on a center of population. But if memory had been fully active, fully functional, we would long since have had some agreement on the use—or rather the non-use—of these weapons, some curbs on their manufacture and deployment. For some, the memory is certainly still there; but it seems to me very spotty in the centers of power. A Caspar Weinberger or a Richard Perle, it seems to me, must never have grasped the meaning of the Hiroshima bomb, the way they go on about a future with bigger and better nuclear weapons. In the Soviet Union, there's probably very little memory of it. The control of information there is such that I wonder how many really know what happened in

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Hiroshima. Then, you have to remember that two generations have come along since the bombs were dropped. A very large number of citizens of this country, of every country, have no memory at all of what happened. The memory isn't even there.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think is memory's role in the creation, rather than the effect, of literature? I guess this is a question that has more to do with fiction . . .

HERSEY

A writer is bound to have varying degrees of success, and I think that that is partly an issue of how central the burden of the story is to the author's psyche. The things that have worked best for me have been the things that really mattered in some deep way to me. Another way of saying this is that a measure of whether a book works or not is the degree to which the author's memory is fully drawn into the undertaking. I don't mean by that that the substance of the book has to come from what the author remembers; but it seems to me important that the fiction should have the kind of relationship to the writer's memory that dreams may have. The dream material doesn't often seem to have any direct source in the person's life, but it must have been constructed from what the writer remembers. So I think a measure of the power of a work lies in the depth of the memory that is drawn on to fabricate the surface of the work.

INTERVIEWER

We've talked about the use of fictional techniques in nonfiction; but you are known as well for your use of nonfictional devices in your novels. The first manifestation of that was *The Wall*, the novel which followed *Hiroshima*.

HERSEY

I wrote most of a first draft of *The Wall* from the universal point of view, that of an all-knowing author—1085 longhand pages—and then realized that since I hadn't experienced any of the life in the Warsaw ghetto, the novel needed an authority

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I couldn't bring to it. And so I gave the book then to Noach Levinson, and rewrote it, or *he* did, in diary form. I had heard about a mass of documents called the Ringelblum Archive—they later were translated and published here, but long after *The Wall*—which suggested the archival device I used. But I wasn't breaking any ground; the epistolary form has been used for a long time.

INTERVIEWER

I read one criticism of *The Wall* which maintained that the book suffered mainly from its author not being a Jew. Whether or not that's valid, it must have crossed your mind during the writing.

HERSEY

Oh yes. I had had, as a child, quite a lot of Old Testament tossed my way, and I spent the better part of a year and a half reading not only about Judaism, but as well writings by people like Sholom Aleichem and Peretz and Buber. All that I could get my hands on, to try to identify as much as I could with what it meant to be a Jew. I think that, to the extent I was able to overcome being a non-Jew, the sources must have been in the childhood I was talking about, in having been a foreigner in the culture in which I lived. And so, I was able to try, at any rate, to identify with what it meant to be a Jew in the circumstances of Warsaw in those years.

INTERVIEWER

It must not have been an easy decision, to rewrite something as long and ambitious as *The Wall* almost from scratch. Did you have any colleagues, any writer friends whose opinions you could solicit in these matters?

HERSEY

I didn't have much experience of that kind of friendship and help, and I'm not sure how widespread that is in American life—or was; it may be more common now than it was then. My readers were family and friends rather than writers. I don't

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think I had as much editing as I would have liked to have on my books. My experience working with Shawn and others on magazine pieces suggested ways in which I might have had a more searching editing of the books. On my last book, *The Call*, I did get wonderful editing from Judith Jones at Knopf. I've had a wonderful relationship with her; she is, I would say, one of the few remaining editors who fulfill the whole range of the editor's function. But for many years, I was overtrusted by Knopf.

INTERVIEWER

What is that "editor's function"?

HERSEY

One of the things that has been bad for American publishing was the invention of the person called a copy-editor, an expert who knows grammar and can spot inconsistencies: a technician of text. Many copy-editors are very good at what they do, but the creation of that function has taken away from the principal editor a basic interest in the text. Most editors, with some notable exceptions, have become packagers now, rather than close editors. And I think that publishers are more interested in acquisitions from their editors than they are in developing to the fullest extent the craft of each writer they deal with. Publishing has changed in my years. I've worked since the era of Alfred Knopf Sr., who had as contemporaries people like Alfred Harcourt, Horace Liveright, Charles Scribner Sr., all essentially book men. In the case of Knopf, he was dazzled by authorhood; he cared more about his relationship with authors than he did about his relationship with books. His concern was the full career of the writer. He lost many authors, he was crusty, many writers moved on to other firms. But Knopf's concern was always for the growth of the person as a craftsman. Now—again with some worthy exceptions—the heads of firms are more apt to be businessmen. That's been a loss, I think.

INTERVIEWER

It is notable that you've been with Knopf through forty-odd years and twenty-one books.

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HERSEY

All my life. I've had a very happy relationship with them.

INTERVIEWER

If we can talk a little bit about how you write: I understand you are a great fan of the word processor. Does it change the way you write in any way?

HERSEY

I was introduced to the idea very early. Alvin Eisenman, the head of the design department of the Yale School of Art, came to me in 1972 and said that a young electrical engineer, Peter Weiner, was developing a program called the Yale Editor on the big university computer, with the hope that there would be terminals in every Yale office. They were curious to see whether it would work for somebody who was doing more or less imaginative work, and they asked me if I'd be interested in trying it. My habit up to that point had been to write first drafts in longhand and then do a great deal of revision on the typewriter. I had just finished the longhand draft of a novel that was eventually called *My Petition for More Space*, so I thought, well, I'll try the revision on this machine. And I found it just wonderfully convenient; a huge and very versatile typewriter was what it amounted to. It could remember what I'd done, and help me find mistakes, and so on. If I used an out-of-the-way word and had a dim memory of having used it a hundred pages earlier, I could simply type the word and ask the machine to find it, and there it would be, in its context, right away, instead of my having to riffle through a hundred pages and spend two or three hours looking for it. It was simply a time-saver. It took about a month to get used to looking at words on a screen, almost as if in a new language; but once that was past, it seemed just like using a typewriter. So when these badly named machines—processor! God!—came on the market some years later, I was really eager to find one. I think there's a great deal of nonsense about computers and writers; the machine corrupts the writer, unless you write with a pencil you haven't chosen the words, and so on. But it has made revision much more inviting to me, because when I revised before on the typewriter,

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there was a commitment of labor in typing a page; though I might have an urge to change the page, I was reluctant to retype it. But with this machine, there's no cost of labor in revision at all, so I've found that I've spent much more time, much more care, in revision since I started using it.

INTERVIEWER

Some writers think that what one starts out to write will come out differently if one uses a word processor. Not "corrupt," necessarily, but different . . .

HERSEY

I don't think so. You know, the classic question that the ladies in the audiences of writers' lectures ask—or used to ask, in old days—was, "Do you write with a pencil or a typewriter?" I think every writer becomes habituated to a way of working that may matter to him a great deal. Disturbing the rituals surrounding writing may be very confusing, very difficult. I think there are a lot of things that are annoying about modern computers, particularly the ones that are interactive and keep giving you cute questions to answer as you work. That kind of thing would madden me. But I have a very simple, old-fashioned, "dedicated" word processor that doesn't inflict any of that on me. I think of it as a useful tool.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned Silone and Dos Passos and Faulkner as some of the writers who excited you when you were starting out. Are there any contemporaries that you especially admire?

HERSEY

I think I'll duck that one. I wrote book reviews in the very early days, before I had become a writer, in a sense; but when I felt that I had become one, I drew back from judging my contemporaries. I think I'd rather not do that. I'll talk with you about that some other time.

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INTERVIEWER

When you set out to write a novel, where does it begin for you? What comes first?

HERSEY

I think the first impulse comes from some deep emotion. It may be anger, it may be some sort of excitement. I recognize in the real world around me something that triggers such an emotion, and then the emotion seems to cast up pictures in my mind that lead me towards a story. To give you an example, the impulse to write *The Wall* came from seeing some camps in Eastern Europe when I was working as a correspondent in Moscow for *Time*. We were taken first to Estonia, and there we saw a camp where the Germans had had orders to kill everybody before they left; they had done it in a crude and awful way, making the prisoners build their own pyres before shooting them. We went later to Poland, and though the Warsaw ghetto itself was completely razed, we saw a couple of camps where the same thing had happened, the Germans had been ordered to kill everybody. In each case, there had been a few survivors to talk to. This came at a time when the West had not yet known very much about the Holocaust; there had been some vague rumors of the camps, but we had no real pictures of them. To see these bodies, to hear from the people who survived, created a sense of horror and anger in me that made me want to write. I thought at first to write about one of the camps like Auschwitz, and I did a lot of research on that; then it appeared to me, later on, that the life in the ghettos was at least something like real life for a long time, and so would, I thought, lend itself better to a novel. But it was the sense of distress, fear, anger that I felt seeing those camps that got me launched on that work.

INTERVIEWER

Do you always know where you're headed once you begin?

HERSEY

No, I don't. I work by all sorts of methods. In some cases

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I've wanted to have the whole book outlined before I started. In others I have simply begun writing and let the story take me where it would. *A Single Pebble* was an example of the latter. I had thought through *The Wall* pretty thoroughly before I started writing. But it's almost invariably been the case, when I've tried to plan through to the end, that I've had to modify the plan very sharply as the characters became—*if* they became—real to me, and began behaving in ways I couldn't control quite so easily.

INTERVIEWER

In the introduction to *The Writer's Craft*, you say that the writing of imaginative literature seems to require "an altered state of consciousness." How would you characterize it in your case?

HERSEY

When the writing is really working, I think there is something like dreaming going on. I don't know how to draw the line between the conscious management of what you're doing and this state. It usually takes place in the earlier stages, in the drafting process. I would say that it's related to day-dreaming. When I feel really engaged with a passage, I become so lost in it that I'm unaware of my real surroundings, totally involved in the pictures and sounds that that passage evokes. So I think it's a kind of dream state of some sort, though it has baffled most people who've tried to analyze just what takes place in the creative process. Even Freud, who gave up on almost nothing, seemed to have given up on that. It remains mysterious; and it's probably a good thing that it does. It may be that the mystery is among the things that attract those of us who write.

INTERVIEWER

Your novels vary greatly in style and subject matter, sometimes taking on various nonfictional disguises—the unearthed diary in *The Wall*, or the transcript of legislative hearings in *The Child Buyer*. What is the relationship between that kind

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of variance and the consistency of the fictional "voice" you speak of?

HERSEY

The voice is the element over which you have no control; it's the sound of the person behind the work. I suppose there are some more or less conscious elements in voice; that is to say, a self-conscious manipulation of rhythm that may become habitual. But even the rhythms, it seems to me, stem from personality rather than from something acquired or mechanical. They're the tremblings of individuality. A person whose mind blurts will blurt in prose, and a person whose mind flows will flow in prose. Even writers who have experimented can't avoid this—a model would be Faulkner, who tried so many different ways of solving fictional problems, yet the voice was always clearly Faulkner's. He was helpless in that respect; his voice was his voice.

INTERVIEWER

At the risk of asking another back-of-the-lecture-hall question: Do you keep to a regular schedule, and has it changed since you stopped teaching?

HERSEY

As I said, I think there's a great deal of habit in writing, and I have worked to the same schedule ever since I cut away from *Time* and *Life*. During the years when I was teaching, I didn't try to do any new work in term time. On *The Call*, for example, which took me six years to write, I would spend the time when I was teaching doing the research for the next chunk of the novel, and the rest of the year doing the writing work. It was one of the reasons why I taught just one term of the year, to be free the rest of the year to do my own work.

INTERVIEWER

Some writers say they find the teacher's life constricting. That didn't seem to be the case with you.

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HERSEY

I backed into teaching. I had thought that it would be constricting, most of my working life. In the early sixties we'd been living in the suburbs of New York, in Southport and Weston, and were thinking about trying city life. We looked at New Haven, and heard about a house on the market there, that belonged to Yale. I asked Kingman Brewster, whom I had known, if we could look at it. He said yes, and we did and found it too big for us. A week or so later, at a social gathering of some kind, Brewster took my wife and me aside and said, "I think I can solve your real-estate problem. There's a house on Park Street," which happened to be the Master's House of Pierson College, "and you're welcome to take that if you take on the job of being Master." I had no idea what that meant; but within a couple of hours, my wife and I said, let's shake our lives up and try it. So we lived in Pierson for the last five years of the sixties, a wild time. And I was truly shaken up by it. I found being around the young rejuvenating, and often trying: very difficult times, the sixties. But I enjoyed it a great deal. And then after I left I found that I'd become addicted to the company of the young. So I began, first very tentatively and then with growing pleasure and enthusiasm, teaching a couple of seminars every year.

INTERVIEWER

Was that as rewarding, or as trying, as your role as Master?

HERSEY

I found the struggles of students who were trying to find themselves as writers fascinating and very moving. I think that their struggles somehow had echoes in my own continuing struggles. A writer never really finds his voice, but is always striving, I think, to find it. This is one of the reasons I've had a horror of repeating myself. I believed that if I ever concluded that I knew exactly what my voice was, I would stagnate. The writer grows, has experiences, feels joys and pains that somehow accrete and change him, so that the voice that was appropriate when I wrote *A Bell for Adano* was not appropriate when I

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wrote *The Call*. What I'm saying is that I think I learned from students that the struggle that was so intense in their case was still appropriate for me.

INTERVIEWER

What aspects of writing did you try to teach, or feel could be taught?

HERSEY

It's simply a matter of helping the student to set gifts free. That's about all you can hope for.

INTERVIEWER

A hot topic now among writers and academics is the value of graduate writing programs—some say they not only don't help, but actually hurt the young writer.

HERSEY

There's long been argument among writers about whether they should let themselves be captured by the academic world, whether they don't stultify there, and so on. I have always had the view that it really doesn't matter what a writer does; the argument that you should go out and meet raw life, work on the crew of a freighter, take part in revolutions and what not, doesn't seem to me valid. What matters is how a writer responds to the life around him. When I arrived in Pierson that first term, I had thought of the university as an ivory tower, and had been afraid that if I was incarcerated there I would stagnate. But in the very first term we had every human manifestation that I could think of except for murder. And we almost had that, from time to time. We did have violent death, and suicide, and rape, and everything in degrees up to those trauma. So the life is around you wherever you are, whatever you do, and it's a matter of how keenly and sensitively you respond to what's happening.

INTERVIEWER

You said in several places, most notably in *Letter to the Alumni*, what great hope and expectation you placed in the

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energy and generosity of the students of that time. Were you disappointed by what you saw in the years following?

HERSEY

There certainly has been a deep shift in the center of gravity of motive among students since the sixties—and not only among students, but in the culture as a whole. The deep impulse that I wanted to try to write about in *The Call* was, I think, a very American one, of wanting to be useful and helpful in the world. It's not by any means simply a Christian or missionary impulse; it's manifested in the Peace Corps, and in the kind of response the starvation in Africa has brought. But it seems to me that in the last twenty-five years the impulse of greed has grown in this country, the self-centered drive that makes people primarily fight for their own. The whole swing of the dominant political force toward the right has been, I think, a reflection of and stimulus to this move toward self-centeredness or greed. I find it very distressing.

INTERVIEWER

You taught fiction writing for fifteen years. Did you ever have any sense of seeing trends in the classroom emerge a few years later as trends in contemporary fiction?

HERSEY

Much more the other way around. In the effort to find a voice, young writers will try on various models to see whether they fit. But the gifted students never let themselves be beguiled by fashion. They write out of what they have. One of the things that has been happening in recent years is that the new forms of communication, particularly radio and television, have tended to make people's attention spans shorter. There's a much greater tendency to write in telegrams than there used to be. The pressure is for a kind of tightness, that must be influenced somehow by the 45-second commercial and the evening news. We're bombarded by these swift images—by "we" I mean even writers who don't watch television very much, yet who must be responsive to a readership that largely does. So there's been a great pres-

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sure for speed, concision, tightness, that has changed the nature of short stories particularly. But still, writers who have vigor and power form their own way and pay no attention to that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned mediation in nonfiction, and how, in *Hiroshima*, you tried to eliminate it. Yet in *The Algiers Motel Incident*, your account of one event during the Detroit race riots of 1968, you made a very conspicuous entry into the narrative. What was different about that circumstance?

HERSEY

That was the first time I had done that. I tried to face it that the situation of the black in America had a kind of urgency, and put demands on me as a white of a kind that made it impossible for me to withdraw, for me not to be there as a mediator. The whole burden of Ellison's *Invisible Man* is that whites refuse to look at blacks; and I didn't want to be, couldn't afford to be blind in that respect, and so had to, I thought, come out in the open. Much as one may try to disappear from the work, there is a kind of mediation that takes place in journalism, no matter what. By selecting 999 out of 1000 so-called facts, you are bringing your own bias to bear. In that case, I thought that the biases which I recognized—to my distress, having thought myself fairly clean in that respect—had to be stated; I had to get them out.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that that "situation" has been, or is being, resolved?

HERSEY

I think it's been pushed to one side, in a way that is bound to haunt us in the long run. The situation has improved in some ways. I went down, for instance, to Mississippi in 1964, the summer when all the students went down there. I lived with a black farmer who was in great danger on account of my living

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with him. It was scary to me, but to him it was mortally dangerous. There was that summer the beginning of an effort to register people to vote, and he had the courage to register, and to take other blacks to do so. Everywhere we went, when he drove me around, there was a pickup behind us with a shotgun showing. So it was a very scary thing. We were in Holmes County, the center of which was a town called Tchula. Tchula recently elected a black mayor. So there have been changes, probably more profound in the South than in the North. But the fundamental problems of race and class have not been faced by our society. And I think that we are bound to have to face them sooner or later. The paradox is that trouble will probably come when we have a freer, more liberal administration; the opening up of possibilities will probably create a more dangerous situation. It is a paradox, and an unhappy one, that a repressive administration like this one seems to make the problem go away. But it doesn't. It stores up the powder.

INTERVIEWER

Are we in, do you think, anything like the "age of American repression" you warned of in *Letter to the Alumni*?

HERSEY

No, but there are signs that it might be in the making. We have a wonderfully healthy Constitution, and the one hope is that things may correct themselves every four years, or every eight years. Or every twelve years. The issue would be whether there would be time enough.

INTERVIEWER

You have been cited, to your chagrin, as an "ancestor" of the New Journalism. Yet there seems to be much in it that you disapprove of; as you wrote in your essay "The Legend on the License" in the *Yale Review* a few years ago, "I am one worried grandpa. The time has come to redraw the line between journalism and fiction."

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HERSEY

I think it is true that I was one of many who began to experiment, early on, with ways of using the devices of fiction in journalism. I was certainly not alone in that. It was a valid movement, and one that has opened up journalism a lot. The important thing that was taking place was that journalists were making it more possible for readers to identify with the figures and the events about which they were writing. The fictional mode made it easier for the reader to imagine that these events were happening to him. But eventually two things polluted the so-called New Journalism. The fictional methods tempted some writers to cross the line, touch up their nonfiction—to invent. And then the fictional voice that transferred to journalism became more and more audible; the element of the subjective that appears under the surface of fiction came to the surface in the journalism, so that in the end, the figure of the journalist became more important than the events being written about.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned doing the "research" for *The Call*. What do you think is the role of factual, historical research in the writing of fiction?

HERSEY

It's a substitute for memory, I suppose; though I also suppose that Tolstoy in writing *War and Peace* must have done a lot of reading about a period fifty and sixty years earlier, which he hadn't lived through. Not that I mean to compare *The Call* with *War and Peace*. But Flannery O'Connor said in one of her essays that fiction is an incarnational act; you're trying to make flesh and blood of things that are remembered. And in order to do that it's absolutely essential to make the past concrete. There have to be real, palpable objects, things seen, things heard. So either memory or a substitute for memory has to operate to bring those things into the fields of vision and hearing. Research in this case was partly a substitute, partly a supple-

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ment, to memory. I had at least a child's memory of the world of China, and I went back four years ago and refreshed my memory. I had gone a couple of times as a journalist in the meantime. But I also needed the memory of others to make the world I was writing about as real as possible. The need for concreteness was put wonderfully by Garćia Márquez, in an interview in your magazine, when he said, "If I say I saw elephants flying, nobody would believe me; but if I say I saw twenty-four elephants flying, they might." There is something about exactness of detail that makes imagined things seem to come true.

INTERVIEWER

One of the notable things about *The Call* is that your father, Roscoe Hersey, appears as a minor character in it. Was that to discourage people from thinking that the main character, David Treadup, was modeled after your father?

HERSEY

Partly, I suppose; but really to reinforce the verisimilitude. Again, I think of a line of García Márquez's about that: "One word of falsity in journalism destroys the whole, but one actual fact in a fiction may make it seem believable." I think that's what I was after in using my father's name.

INTERVIEWER

Was this a book you had been meaning to write for a while? Had you been saving it in any way?

HERSEY

I suppose in ways it should have been my first novel; usually, a first novel is a trip back into childhood. I'm glad that it came as I am practicing to enter second childhood, rather than when I was coming out of my first one, because I think I could bring more of the experience of my life to that scene of memory than I could have when I was very young. I had never made earlier stabs at the book. Probably it was only with the deaths of my mother and father that I began to think more about them and

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about the past. I'm trying to think where it welled up from; I can't remember any moment at which I decided that it was time to write that book.

INTERVIEWER

But in *A Single Pebble*, for instance, you went back to China in a sense.

HERSEY

Yes, and there the missionary figure is displaced by the figure of the engineer. I suppose, in a way—though I've tried to avoid repetition—that there are repetitions of the same figure throughout my books. Major Joppolo in *A Bell for Adano*, I suppose, displaced the same character. Or perhaps Noach Levinson or Berson in *The Wall*. But I don't think that any of this is conscious—I've not thought of this sort of connection until now. I tend, when I finish a work, to put it out of mind completely, and go on to something else.

INTERVIEWER

It's fair to say that your nonfiction has had a considerable social impact. What kind of impact do you think your fiction, or fiction in general, has? Does fiction teach?

HERSEY

I believe that writers of fiction have somewhere always a motive of first trying to figure out for themselves how life can be less difficult than it seems to be. Indirectly, they may have a motive of trying to share whatever's learned with a reader. I think that *The Wall*, being very early in opening up to the American consciousness what had happened during the Holocaust, had a value of revelation, and may have helped people to understand things they hadn't understood before. Since then, many much more authentic works have come from people who lived through the Holocaust, and so the experience has gone deeper, and the understanding has gone deeper for people who've read those works. I don't think I have an impulse to teach in my writing. I do have a deep need to try to understand. In my effort

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to understand, I may hope that I can help readers to understand more about life, more about the stressful events I'm writing about. But I found the experience of teaching, when I actually did it, very different from the experience of writing. Mainly because in teaching, I'm trying to explore the student I'm dealing with, and in the writing, I'm trying to explore myself.

INTERVIEWER

You are on record in several places as dismissing the idea that the novel is dead. What you you think is its current state of health?

HERSEY

I think it's more alive than ever. Fiction has no boundaries. Just as we're getting farther and farther out into space, I think we're opening up the boundaries of fiction more and more. The fact that we don't recognize three or four giants in the world of fiction now, as we tended to when, say, Faulkner and Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Dos Passos were operating, doesn't mean that there aren't remarkable pieces of writing being done. It's just that there are so many vivid writers going now that it's very hard to say that we have just this handful that matter. The range from the somewhat traditional Bellow to Pynchon and Barth and Barthelme, and to people even farther out on the edges of consciousness than those three, is very great these days. There is a violent competition from other forms of entertainment now; and yet the world of readers doesn't seem to be diminishing proportionately. There are too many books published, and consequently publishing has become a lottery. Many good books disappear, never to be seen again, or possibly not until they're rediscovered many years later, as some novels have had the good fortune to be—as Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* was some years ago, for instance.

INTERVIEWER

After the success of *Hiroshima*, you concentrated almost exclusively on fiction. Was that a conscious decision?

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HERSEY

I can't say that it was anything I thought through very deliberately. I was attracted to fiction for the reasons I gave before; I thought that there was a better chance, if what I did worked, to get the reader to experience the material than there would be in journalism. Sometimes, the stuff is too raw and immediate to be dealt with in fiction. There's a need for distance from the material that only time can give; so when something like the Detroit riots came along, I still resorted to nonfiction as a way of dealing with it. Then I wanted to try to experiment some; I've had a horror of repeating myself and running down on that account. So I began to try a number of things, some of which worked and some of which didn't. But they were always challenging and fun to try. I think in ways I was lucky to be hit by an early success—if the Pulitzer Prize and two or three books that did well represented success—because it left me free to do what I wanted to do. You know, I kept talking to my classes about the fact that the writing itself is the only real reward. I think I was able to learn that very early, and so have been able to take pleasure from some kinds of writing that I knew were not going to be accepted in the way that some of the early work had been. I still got pleasure from the doing.

— **Jonathan Dee**

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# Jealousy

## Leonard Michaels

*The girl who only because she walked arm in arm with her sweetheart looked quietly around.*

—*Kafka's* Diaries

He phoned his wife at her lover's apartment. She asked him to repeat himself. He was sobbing and unintelligible. He wanted her to come home and collect her clothes. The sight of them was unbearable. She'd been conscious of his pain before then, but in a strangely general way. To her lover, she'd said, "I feel guilty for not feeling guilty." But with her husband sobbing, she could virtually see her dresses and shoes in the bedroom closet, and she felt something strongly, a kind of urgency. She went home to collect her clothes. Her husband locked the door behind her and beat her up.

I heard her story at a literary conference. She complained that she couldn't write it in a convincing manner. "But it really happened," she said, laughing at herself. "It saved my marriage. You'd think I could write about that."

She had told her husband about the other man and named

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him. Already, to my mind, a failed marriage. Her husband should have known her body; guessed there was another man. Smells change in erotic chemistry, especially about the ears and nostrils; elsewhere, too. Lilies fester. The drama of her love affair should certainly have reached him in how she gave herself. "Where did you learn to do that?" was a question he never asked. The man was dull. He made nothing of her luminous moods or irrational petulance. Her revulsion at the shape of his feet and his habit of scratching his head didn't strike him as curious developments. He made nothing of his own depression and malaise. Simply didn't know why he'd become that way. He was even cruel to his girlfriend and didn't know why. He'd had to be told by his wife, in so many words, about her lover. The poor man's suffering exceeded his understanding. He beat her up. "But it really happened," she said, laughing moronically at herself.

Another woman at the conference, drawn forth by the story, said her husband accused her of sleeping with his best friend, a master carpenter. He helped build their sailboat. The accusations began at breakfast and resumed at night when her husband returned from work. He ruined her nicest dinners. He ruined her sleep. All her efforts to make them happy—and she "really tried"—were turned into ugly occasions by his suspiciousness. Marriage counseling did them no good. Her husband wouldn't discuss "real problems."

"Were you?" I asked.

"What?"

"Fucking his friend?"

"Yes, but that's not the point."

Her exasperation was fierce. She lifted her hands, fingers bent into laborious hooks.

"I cleaned. I cooked. I washed his filthy hairs out of the bathtub. Our sex life was terrific, especially toward the end."

There was nothing anyone could say.

In the emptiness, I remembered how I used to meet a certain woman, on Sunday mornings, in the parking lot behind

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her church. I'd wait in my car, in the darkness of a low hanging willow, smoking cigarettes until the service was over. Then I'd see her strike across the steamy asphalt in her high heels and dark blue churchgoing suit, a white flower in the lapel. She looked magnificent, yet my car was good enough for her; all we needed. As she talked about God, her wonderful cloud of hair bloated with a blonder light. Her breath flowed with perfume. Once, she surprised me, her voice bitter and reproachful, as if I'd done something bad. But it was her fiancé, not me. She said he'd made a gruesome scene last night, shrieking at her in a crowded oyster bar, "You sucked another man's cock."

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't think. I started to kiss her, but she thrust me back, making me see how pity mixed with pain in her eyes. "Can you believe he said that to me? All those people sitting there eating oysters. Can you imagine how I felt?"

I nodded yes, yes, yes, but she wanted me to wait, listen to her, let the sacred fullness of her sorrow sink into me. She wanted me to feed on her immensely beseeching stare, her prim blue suit, the little flower in the lapel. Somehow, as I waited, I pressed her backwards. She tucked up her skirt. Hot slick thighs flashed in the shady car. The pretty church danced beyond the willow. The vision of her fiancé lingered, small, far away. Such suffering should matter, but in the convulsive pitch of things there is no should. "You're greedy," she said.

I begged her to marry me.

"You mean it, don't you?" Her lips moved against my cheek, as if she talked to a deaf child, each word a touching pressure. "You know," she whispered, "I've never gotten a speeding ticket. The cop looks at me, then just can't seem to write it. When they start writing me tickets, ask me again."

She saved me from myself, but why did I want her? She was only ten years older than my son. He'd have started smoking dope; maybe run away.

"Can you believe my fiancé said that to me?"

Her question passed like the shadow of a bird through my heart.

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*Jim Powell*

## The Beginning of Winter

Each evening now the ash blue flame
swept from my fingertips
climbing its gas ladder up the flue
burns more the color of that single earring,
one of the pair your father

left you, lost in a crack now
somewhere under my bed
lodged out of reach—its jade bead
the size of a bird's eye among the splintered
rubble of wrenched beams

and plaster when this house is finally
pulled down: small hope of shining
then, warm on a flushed cheek, no matter
if its story sticks—garbled in old men's
gravel throats, the rumor

of a love long since interred—
or if its gold pin pricks
some gardener setting irises, thick hands
too numbed in the cold soil to feel his bead
of blood lost there: blue flowers

will greet him from his yard that spring.
This winter, nights will be colder
with you gone. Each evening now these jets in flame
climb reaching from my fingers to be consumed
as utterly as this day.

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*Liam Rector*

## Getting Over Cookie

In the ninth grade I met a fantastic number of times
with Cookie Harris in the woods . . . Under the pretense
of going over our Algebra notes, given the pressure
of the pop quizzes being served up then
with an alarming frequency, we'd have at
each other, kissing and squishing
against each other . . . She'd stop, in a manner
peculiar to those times, once I had my first full feel
of her breasts (enormous and soft, as I remember —
a source of fascination and grief
to every frenzied boy I knew),
and then we'd go into the dry-humping
segment of our routine until one of us
rolled over and it would all be over . . .
We would return, sitting on the invariably damp ground
and in utter depression, to the formulas
and to the grade-gettings of the day . . .
She wanted me to be her boyfriend and led me
to believe I could go farther, much farther,
should I but make the noises of consent
on that front, but I had eyes
for one of the DiFilippo twins
who lived across the tracks and resented me
for the poverty of my parents and my own acne
(which Cookie had a touch of as well —
we were poor kids on the outs, with only
bad skin to inherit), so I withheld what was then
the violent tumult of my callow affections . . .
This kind of Marxist melodrama,
rife with the underpinnings of dominance
and submission, was to haunt me

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well into my twenty-fifth year, when I met and married,
in a veritable dither, one Allison Cromwither,
in a ceremony covered by *The New York Times*
and taking place at the estate of her approving parents . . .
Her father was a bull-boy broker and her mother
was left-leaning and as cultural as they came
in those days . . . Between them
they sponsored a fine literary press that issued
its four slim volumes each year, and as it happened
my own debut in verse had been among those
in the last batch to appear . . . The book became known,
befamed immediately for the surge and pith
by which it dismantled the injuries of class in America,
and her father was convinced I was just the fellow
to restore the meanness and the juices he was certain
Bryn Mawr had taken out of his increasingly anorexic
Allison . . .
Far from snubbing me because of my humble origins,
Bull-Boy saw in me the stirrings of his own early anger
and hysteria, and trusted that "fire in the belly" intensity
to lift Allison suddenly into the bounties of nature
and make for the bellowings which had in the past attended
his own breakthrough business successes . . .
He told me it seemed as though I had just come in
out of the forest . . . And I could see that the mother,
whatever her misgivings, was merely waiting
to get her affluent mitts on me, to lie down with another
of "her" authors . . . Allison made an ideology
out of everything in those days, which I took
to be remarkably transcendent and high-minded,
until it became clear, altogether too clear,
that this was part of an irrefutable sorrow and anger
eating at her, saddening and outraging her . . .
As alluring as she was, she was always perilously close
to being committed, never far from the mental ward of it all . . .
And given how confused and co-opted I was, after my efforts
to administer to Allison and urge her, with not a whit of luck,
to place herself in the hands of an expensive professional,

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I took to cavorting in the kick-ass bars of my beginnings,
looking to recapture there some semblance of a wilder world
still in the lurid process of somehow getting-ahead
or looking to forget that discreet stampede
within the waters of yet another squat and guzzle . . .
When I was soused I felt like a boy again,
and all I could think of was Cookie, Cookie . . .
Even when hungover and having to face myself in the morning,
gratefully handsome after the rigors of my crater-faced
adolescence,
all I could see through the clearing was Cookie's face . . .
What began as a python thirst of pleasure soon turned
into the worm of need and habit and I was spirited off
to a clinic myself, where Bull-Boy assured me
it was all part of the game and urged me forward again,
back into the ring . . . His wife was off to a spa,
longing for weight-loss, and he desperately needed someone
to confide in . . . Things went on this way
well into my thirties, by which time I was chairperson
of many philanthropic organizations (so many pigs,
so few troughs), and I continued to write savage,
if irony-crippled verses . . . And then one day
Allison announced she would be gone
for the weekend, sequestering herself, as had become
her debilitating gesture, in our cottage in Nantucket,
by the incessant ocean, where she would undoubtedly sit
by her "grieving window" and run her bony fingers
up and down the chill of the pane, while moaning . . .
Rather than accompany her, I decided to jump
into our Alfa Romeo, given to us recently
by her mother and used by Mummy and I for our sordid trysts
in the surrounding countryside, and I floored it
towards the Middle Atlantic section of the country,
from whence I had come . . . And there she was,
perched in the same squalid neighborhood, getting by
in a mean but well-kempt hovel, and with a dignity
well beyond her years . . . Cookie was there, ineluctably
there, and though there were tales of abortion, betrayal —

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tales of lugging impossible tracts by Trotsky
off to her job as a receptionist, to be read
when her boss wasn't looking or promising her
a raise if he could but once stare upon the naked flesh
of her jugs revealed, and she all the while trying
to delineate what "forces" had brought her to this abyss
of desolation . . . These autodidact obsessions moved me
beyond all belief, and I was on the phone to New York
immediately: I would not be coming back . . . I would be
staying with Cookie . . . Bull-Boy, older now and damaged
beyond redemption himself, saw this for what it was —
my *last chance*, and one he might well have given himself
earlier, had he but the foresight or the still-burning fire . . .
He vowed to notify Allison as soon as he could penetrate her
solitary vigil at the Cape, and said were she not answering
he would leave a message for her on the tape . . .
And he said to go ahead and keep the car!
I could not then, nor as things came to pass
did I ever, abandon my Romantic Tory sense of reality,
but coupled with Cookie's Commie zeal I was certain
we could make a go of things, and for many years
we did . . . We looked out for each other,
laid down fully in the firm grip of each other,
and though we were swallowed in the deeper forest to come,
my sole measure of triumph and loss
rises and falls around those final hours with Cookie
before she left me here alone, widowed for love,
driving a sports car without her,
with too much, finally, to ever get over . . .

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*Mark Rudman*

## The Punch

To take advantage of the January thaw, I walk
uptown to savor the grapefruits and green
peppers in the winter light, then, returning, turn
the corner to see the aftermath of a slap,
a lover's quarrel perhaps, no, nearing the red-
headed woman who is crying,
and three, four, five, or six
gathering bystanders,
it's clear that wasn't the case.
"I wasn't doing anything," she says
between her tears and the fiercely red
right side of her face,
"she just came up to me and hit me."
"Who her, that one?"—the woman, girl?
strutting down the block and as we stare
at her back turning on her heel as if
she overheard.

The redhead speaks with an Israeli accent,
English is definitely not her first language, and
it's not clear whether she's more hurt or shocked
but no one knows what to do.
One assumes so much.
That the two were walking toward each other
rather than parallel,
that the girl stepped abruptly into the woman's path,
grabbed her left arm, shouted at her,
and cracked her across the face with the palm
of her right hand,
that the redheaded woman was lost
in her own thoughts when this other person
surprised her.

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I find it impossible to assume that they were walking
toward each other, like gunfighters, from one end
of the street to the other, difficult to believe
even that the redhead sensed danger
more than seconds before the girl accosted her,
inflamed by her red hair and pale skin,
and yet so much of what I reconstruct
has to do with how they acted
during and after the actual blow,
the girl strutting, jaunty,
the woman slow to react. . . .

My sense now of what I saw is that it wasn't a slap
but a punch and that it was random,
transcendentally stupid, but then
why should asteroids be confined to outer space?
The deception lies in the human form.
In the sunlight, doled out one morning.

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*Sherod Santos*

## Mothers & Fathers

How strange to see their faces start to worry
Into ours, and after all those years
We spent pretending we had made a life
Apart from, and, we'd hoped, less painful
Than their own. But all those years
They've simply been asleep somewhere inside,
As blank and spectral as the numbering
Dead just waiting for that soft command
By which all troubled sleepers wake
To find the lives they abandoned lying down:
*It's time*, that's all, *It's time*. And so,
As all of us will on waking, they've
Stumbled up to a mirror which, as it turns
Out, we are for them: and there they stare,
A little vaguely at first, as though
Lost between the dreamer and the dreamed,
While we compose the face that looks
Back at them the way they look at us.

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*James Schuyler*

## Mood Indigo

*for David Trinidad*

. . . and the curtain rose in that theatre so long ago
and the music is playing
the first song I fell in
love to today so soon
is it possible
and there, gigantic, is the face
on the backdrop
of the elegant Duke
the song Mood Indigo
unforgettable dragging rhythm
his smile
the tie
the stick pin
enter the dancer
in tights
darkest blue
she dances sinuously
right up to him
the elegant smiling Duke
and the stickpin
three-dimensional
she lies back upon
it
and revolves
sexy, I so young
and the rhythm
dragged out
enter the man in black
is he her fate?

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a dangerous destiny
O infamous race riots
of Washington, D.C.!
slowly they revolve
is she dying?
she is dying slowly
and the Duke
the audience so still
so rapt
Saturday matinees of vaudeville
my childhood
already in love today
perhaps
they have left the stage
and she returns
somehow a different
dancer
and on the tie pin
she lies back
as the curtain descends
on a strange love affair
on the afternoon
I first heard
Mood Indigo
everyone claps
the curtains
close
farewell! dancing madness
we will meet again
in Harlem

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# Morphine

## *Frederick Seidel*

I.

*A Narrator will read the numbers and text aloud starting with this statement:*

1. Three spotlighted women stand stage center on an otherwise dark stage. Two of them elegantly dressed in black, the third naked. All are white-haired, in their fifties or older.

2. Behind them on the wall the face in close-up of a still older woman wearing a tiara, in her seventies at least, gradually emerges — a photograph being projected on a screen. The image starts large and gets larger.

3. The three women separate and reveal seated behind them the older woman of the photograph, who slowly rises. She stands there regally — but no tiara — wearing a silk full-length robe. The stage lights come up and the three women walk off stage.

4. The older woman — the Mother — looks at the audience and says in a drawling, comically haughty way:

   You know I have cancer. You know how
   full and wonderful my life has been.
   Much more wonderful than yours —

5. She smiles and is suddenly youthful and charming. And — just as suddenly — stops smiling.

6. The face in close-up of the Mother rises like a moon in the night sky behind the live mother.

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7. The Mother (on stage) intones:

   Now is the right time for me to die. I want to die before I'm too ill to die.

8. She smiles and starts to waltz around the stage.

9. Behind her the tiara'd face in close-up speaks:

   I had a full and wonderful . . . Have presented many awards and received many awards.

10. Daughters 2 and 3 have boogied out on stage — Daughter 3, naked before, now wearing bra and underpants, garter belt and stockings. The daughters dance with the Mother.

11. Daughter 1 comes out on stage and recites — somnambulates out on stage and slowly recites a poem. The other three women have slowed their movements to slow-motion.

12. Daughter 1 is carrying a lighted candle, the others likewise. The stage has darkened. Images of lighted candles proliferate. The poem refers to a candle flame.

13. As Daughter 1 recites, the Mother separates herself from the other two daughters and comes over to stand beside her. Once the recitation has stopped the Mother says to the audience:

    You know that the cancer is terminal. I want it to end. And I expect you to help me.

14. She kisses Daughter 1 and turns back to face the audience again.

    You are my family. You are my daughters. I want to stop dying and die. I expect you to help me.

15. Daughters 2 and 3:

    Of course we'll help you.

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16. Daughter 1

    Of course we'll help you. But only if you'll tell us five things.

17. Daughter 2 and 3:

    You'll have to tell us five things.

18. The Mother:

    I'll tell you five things.

19. Daughter 1, 2, and 3:

    Just make them good ones. Give us a legacy.

20. The Mother:

    I know I'm dying. I want to die now. (Looking at the audience) Of course you'll help me.

21. The daughters surround her on stage so that the audience can't see what is happening.

22. IMAGE: syringes squirting out liquid.

23. IMAGE: hypodermic needle sinking into a steak.

24. IMAGE: a glass empties its liquid into an open pair of lips.

25. IMAGE: chickens running around with their heads cut off.

26. IMAGES of power and speed, lift-off and start-up. An airplane gathers speed and takes off, woman pilot, women passengers. The women in the piece.

27. On screen Daughter 3 begins to shimmy and shake, trembling all over, beginning a dance.

28. On stage Daughter 3 peels off from the group and starts a dervish dance, twirling and spinning, that will last till the piece ends.

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29. Daughters 1 and 2 move apart to reveal the Mother wearing her tiara seated in a chair, eyes closed, mouth open, shaking and trembling as she dies.

30. There is the sound of loud, labored breathing — the agonal breathing of someone near death. The sound will fade out and return a number of times in the course of the piece.

31. IMAGES of blacks rioting. White riot police fighting off blacks in London and Cape Town.

32. IMAGES of Queen Elizabeth accepting gifts and homage from black tribesmen.

33. The Mother rises very regally from her chair and slowly sits back down.

34. Daughter 2 comes in carrying a chair.

35. CAPTION: HOW TO RISE FROM A CHAIR

36. IMAGES of the Mother rising from a throne are repeated.

37. Daughter 2 sits down and after a pause begins to rise and sit, rise and sit.

38. IMAGES, seen from below, of women's buttocks clothed and naked rising and being seated.

39. Daughter 1 comes in carrying a large female doll and seats herself and begins the How to Rise from a Chair routine, rising and sitting over and over, while holding on to her doll.

40. Now — while 3 continues her dervishing — 1 and 2 and the Mother, at different speeds and with somewhat different styles, rise from their chairs and sit back down against a background of buttocks doing the same.

41. The Mother raises her hands in the air and speaks. IMAGES of the Mother speak almost but not quite in unison with her — many mothers saying the same words slightly out of synch.

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So while we were all tomboys — I always
loved that word — certainly my two
sisters and I were — running races with
the boys and winning! — climbing the highest
trees — we fragile girls were receiving
important instruction in how to rise from
a chair! Very important, don't you know.
Tomboy and he-man — there's another one.
He-man — think of it!

42. Daughter 1 leaves the stage while the Mother is speaking and returns wheeling a baby carriage. She forces her oversize doll into it.

43. The Mother begins to sing, repeating her entire speech (41.) several times as verses of a song. Charming, sparkling, it sounds like Mendelssohn.

44. IMAGES of baby carriages, modest ones and immense black limousine ones.

45. IMAGES of Daughters and the Mother pushing baby carriages up to the top of a steep hill.

46. IMAGES of Daughters and the Mother pushing carriages over to the top of a grand outdoor staircase — a long flight of stone steps.

47. The Mother joins Daughter 3 for a bit of dervishing, a little dervishing *à deux*, then stops and speaks.

I've told you one thing and now I'll tell
you another.

48. CAPTION: TAKING MATTERS IN HAND

49. The Mother:

We've got to take matters into our own hands.
Women have got to take matters into their
own hands, literally.

50. IMAGES of military jets taking off. Missiles being fired.

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51. IMAGES — the same ones as before — of rioting in London and Cape Town.

52. Daughter 2 has left the stage and comes back carrying a large rubber truncheon.

53. IMAGES of baby carriages being shoved down the hill, dozens of them, flying down the hill — and others bumping crazily down the stone steps out of control.

54. Daughter 2 attacks Daughter 1's baby carriage, beating it and the baby in it with the truncheon.

55. Suddenly the music stops — all action halts, except for the dervish dance which continues in the silence. The performers freeze. The images black out.

56. Slowly from the silence a buzz of sound emerges — the sound of hubbub and rioting can be discerned faint and far-off but gradually, slowly nearer and louder — till it is a ROAR. Gunfire and screams.

57. Pandemonium onstage. Flashing lights. Lightning. Thunder. The images of rioting in London and Cape Town. The sound of heavy labored breathing. The images pulse stroboscopically.

58. The performers have got off the stage unseen.

59. IMAGE of a space launch. The stage filled with enormous images of the spacecraft.

60. Countdown. Recited lovingly with lyrical music.

61. Lift-off. Slow stately images, slow-motion lift-off, dream-like.

62. The stage has become the stylized interior of a spaceship. An ascending tube cut away on one side for the audience to look in.

63. The performers are back on stage. The Mother and Daughters 1 and 2 are wearing bulky ridiculous costumes meant to make each of them look like a spaceship — like

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the spaceship we saw at lift-off. The dervish dancer, still dancing her dance, is naked.

64. The Mother and Daughters (1 and 2) — looking absurd in their spaceship costumes — sing a sea chantey with appropriately matey gestures.

65. Meanwhile: voice-over of President Kennedy's speech about exploring the new ocean of space and then the IMAGE of Kennedy giving the speech before Congress.

66. The Mother:

    I'm going to get into something more comfortable.

67. Daughters 1 and 2:

    Why don't you fix yourself a drink while I get into something more comfortable.

68. They step out of their spaceship costumes and are wearing girdles and stockings.

69. They walk around the stage until each has found — and got into — her new costume: an astronaut's spacesuit.

70. Daughter 1:

    Mother needs to die much more.

71. IMAGES of night sky — space. Of speeding away from the earth. (See the book with the images of distance and size in ascending and descending powers of ten.) Galaxies. Deep Space.

72. The Mother is helped over to a special spaceshuttle chair-couch and strapped in.

73. Daughters 1 and 2 lift up an enormous syringe — ten feet long — and slowly begin to inject the Mother.

74. Sound of loud breathing.

75. The Mother shakes and trembles — then falls into a deep sleep — then trembles some more.

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76. The injection continues . . .

77. IMAGES of speeding through space.

78. Voice-over recites:

> The speed of light is not the limit. We
> Are free. We glide. . . .

79. The injection continues. The dervish dance has slowed . . . slowed by the drug going in.

80. Daughter 1, still administering the injection, reads aloud from a technical description of morphine and its effects, including in this case final respiratory failure and death.

81. The injection is completed. The Mother is deeply asleep. The syringe is carried offstage by the two Daughters.

82. The Mother suddenly rises from the chair-couch and her deep sleep (the straps magically fall away). Abrupt change of expression from coma to a big smile. She steps out of her astronaut suit and wraps herself in a white robe.

83. Daughters 1 and 2 come back onstage wearing ballgowns.

84. The Mother goes over to a console and turns on a TV. A very large screen lights up and starts to show a porn scene — quickly followed by other screens showing other scenes. Always with women only, no men.

85. Daughters 1 and 2 pull up chairs and join the Mother watching the TV.

86. The Mother:

> I've told you one thing and I've told you
> another. Now shall I tell you about the
> human heart?

87. She switches channels and the images on all the screens are of chests being opened for surgery and exposing the heart beating away.

88. IMAGES of rioting. Buildings in flames.

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89. IMAGES of hearts being operated on.

90. The stage is transformed so that now the interior of the spaceship has become the inside of the human body — the different organs indicated by cardboard cutouts as in a popup book.

91. IMAGES of black servants serving white ladies — in the U.S., in Africa.

92. IMAGES of rioting. Buildings in flames.

93. IMAGES of baby carriages with dolls in them rolling down an incline and into a large pond.

94. IMAGES of ocean waves. A wave tosses a doll up onto the beach. Another wave, another doll. Another.

95. Meanwhile the dervish death dance continues.

96. The Mother walks over to the popup and begins to lecture her daughters on the physiology of her dying. She gestures with a pointer. She pulls out the different organs and pushes them back.

97. She points out an embryo, and a foetus, and a foetus going through the stages of its development.

98. The white-haired women stare in fascination as if they were children learning all this for the first time.

99. The Mother, with her comically grand accent:

> Mother had been dead for years, of
> course. And I remember Daddy giving
> me a book of veterinary medicine
> for horse breeders so I could find
> out the facts of life.

100. IMAGE of a stone tossed into a still pond sending out ripples.

101. UNDERWATER IMAGE of Daughter 1 naked, diving into the water. The image is repeated.

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102. IMAGE of a foetus in utero.

103. The Mother, looking over her shoulder at Daughter 1 and then back at the popup foetus:

> This is you. I recognize you. Let me
> tell you: never underestimate the
> power of love.

104. CAPTION: IN FRONT OF THE SERVANTS

105. Daughters 1 and 2 take the popup display offstage.

106. The Mother walks to the apron of the stage and looks out at the audience. She stands there unconcernedly.

107. IMAGES — terrible images — of the starving in Africa.

108. The death dancer crosses the stage and goes offstage.

109. The Mother stands there patiently, indifferently, as if waiting for a bus, the awful images behind her back.

110. The Mother:

> I said I would tell you five things, but
> I'm not going to. This is the fourth.
> There isn't a fifth.

111. IMAGES of starving women with their babies.

112. The Mother recites:

> This is the tune I wanted to play for you,
> It'll only take a minute of your time.
> La la, la la, it practically plays itself.
> And then the ending: I'm. It ends I'm.

113. A large pool of urine forms beneath the Mother and spreads. Without seeming to notice it, and only after quite a long pause:

> The bladder receives the gold the kidneys refine.

114. IMAGES of buttocks seen from below and behind: stools and urine.

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115. The Mother:

Life being almost too disquieting to live.

116. IMAGES of legs jackknifed, feet in metal stirrups, the head of the baby emerges from the mother.

117. IMAGE of a beautiful summer landscape. Green hills and fields. A river. Vermont. Africa. Soft summer sunset.

118. Voice-over murmurs almost inaudibly, over and over:

Images of salvation, images of calm,
images of forgiveness, images of peace,
images to console, images to restore,
images to . . .

119. The Mother turns and walks calmly back to a chaise lounge at the rear of the stage.

120. The dervish dancer comes back on stage but now dancing more slowly, without frenzy, more lyrically.

121. The other Daughters come out, peacefully dressed in white, and go over to the Mother to help her down on to the chaise.

122. IMAGE behind them of the Mother walking slowly across a green field, preceded and followed by the Daughters, the dervish dance slowly circling her. All the women dressed in white.

123. The voice-over continues uninterruptedly:

. . . images of peace, images to console, etc.

124. Subliminally flashed IMAGE of scenes of blacks rioting.

125. The Mother nears death. Daughters 1 and 2 attend to her.

126. The loud final breathing.

127. Daughter 3's dance now speeds up again for the end, for the death.

128. The IMAGE on the screens is of the Mother and Daughters

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crossing the green field toward the river. Their long white dresses flow. The dancer dances in a slow lilting easy way ahead of and then behind the Mother.

129. IMAGE of the four women at the river's edge. They look out across the river. Arm in arm. Their white hair.

130. IMAGE: the dancer stops.

131. On stage: the dancer stops.

132. The music stops.

133. Five black men carrying small submachine guns rush out on stage in front of the performers and line up facing the audience. They are dressed in street clothes. They point their guns at the audience.

134. Silence. The men, their guns trained on the audience, face the audience in silence.

135. The leader of the group, calmly, the voice of authority:

It's over.

136. The five men open fire on the audience.

THE END

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## II.

What hasn't happened isn't everything
Until in middle age it starts to be.
Night-blooming jasmine, dreams—and when they bring
You out on stage there's silence. Now I see,
You tell the darkness which is watching you.
Applause. Then instantly a hush, a cough.
It was another darkness once you knew
You had a blindfold on. You took it off.
But this is darker—down an unlit street,
An unmarked street, the three blocks to the shore.
They call it Banyan Street, night air so sweet.
Too much increasingly turns into more—
This is the martyrs' grove on Banyan Street.
You breathe a perfumed darkness, numberless
Perfumes. The glistening as wet as meat
Deliciousness of sinking in. The S
OS of it. But it's too late. You reach
The can't stop trembling yes oh yes of it—
Already when you're two blocks from the beach
You start to drown. Love ruled your White House. Sit,
You named your dog. Come, Sit; *sit*, Sit; was love.
Your head explodes although you hear a shot.
Then archaeology . . . below above—
Beneath amnesia, Troy. But you forgot.

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## III.

It sang without a sound: music that
The naive elm trees loved. They were alive.
Oh silky music no elm tree could survive.
The head low slither of a stalking cat,
Black panther darkness pouring to the kill,
Entered every elm—they drank it in.
Drank silence. Then the silence drank. Wet chin,
Hot, whiskered darkness. Every elm was ill.
What else is there to give but joy? Disease.
And trauma. Lightning, or as slow as lava.
Darkness drinking from a pool in Java,
Black panther drinking from a dream. The trees
Around the edge are elms. Below, above.
Man-eater drinking its reflection: love.

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## IV.

Another perfect hour of emptiness.
The final hour, calm as a candle flame.
The evening, enlarging as it neared, became
A sudden freshness, stillness, then the yes,
The fragrant falling yes of summer rain.
The huge grew larger as it neared, the smile,
The smell of rain, and waited for a while,
And went away. Time spilled. It left no stain.

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## V.
## IN MEMORY OF JANE CANFIELD

"The speed of light is not the limit. We
Are free. We glide. Our superluminous
Velocity will take us far. For us,
The superluminous is only the
Beginning of our birth. How born we are.
Compared to how we started. Vast, oh vast.
A lifetime as the measure couldn't last,
The nearest destinations were too far:
A billion years to reach the one inside
You if you could—who holds you, whom you hold.
You kick the covers off asleep, are cold,
And someone covers you, is all. And glide
Off into space. Is all. Space curved by speed—
We really leave the light behind. But hark.
The infinite beginning in the dark
To sigh the universe out of its seed.
The speck that weighs more than the world. Before
The universe—which has no meaning—was
Before the singularity which does.
Invisible nonzero, and we soar.
We sigh from the beginning, and we soar.
We leave the light behind and soar. And soar."

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*Hugh Seidman*

## After The Ear Inn After the Snow

The river icy in the wind.
Jersey glinting from night's amalgam. Neon shines
from the luminous, frosted window.
Drunk, twenty years back,

I pitched over handlebars to snow,
proud of my scarred chin at 2 AM
on the Tenth Avenue bridge
after the Mixers had closed.

There Berryman, the drinker of sherry and gin,
would jump to the Mississippi.
But Charlotte Mew drank
disinfectant and begged: Let me go —

obsessed that her dead sister was not dead,
since no vein had been opened.
Blood throbs in my own. A truck
shifts on West Street through the snow,

brilliant under the street light:
the microphotographs, the hexagonal
crystals on black hung once in a show,
caught in their fall to the literal.

Thus had a man entered under
the camera's hood, to cull them,
for what reason, from the cold:
molecule, cell, sun from the billions.

And I think of the friend who wept at Vallejo:
Tánta vida y jamás!
So much life and never!
Her fervor embarrassed, but then exalted.

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But the cold strikes my chest
and many will tire and fail,
as always some must in the account,
when night falls like a sheet to the face.

And what shall be said for whoever
had no more to say to that sky:
so clear now, as though I were young
on that bridge to its stars.

As I walk the street home, toward a sun
that burns and is consumed—
that first power of the light,
coming in the dark, hours from now.

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*Karl Shapiro*

## At Auden's Grave

From Vienna it's picture-postcard all the way.
Tell me, was ever such a land at ease!
The fat farms glistening, the polished pigs,
Each carven window box disgorging red
Geraniums, pencil pines and chestnut trees,
The gaily painted tractor rigs,
Steeples with onion domes that seem to say
*Grüss Gott*, come lie here in our flowerbed.

How many times did Auden take this train
Till that bright autumn day when he was borne
Back in a baggage car after his last
Recital, back to his horatian house,
His cave of making, now the mask outworn,
The geographical visage consummated,
Back to the village, home to the country man
Without a country, home to the urban bard
Without a city he could call his own.

But suddenly a startling word
Leaps from the signpost of the country lane,
It's AUDENSTRASSE —
The poet becomes a street, the street a poet,
English with German music mated.

Here will arrive no pilgrim mob
As in Westminster Abbey, where his name
Is chiseled next to Eliot's. The sole cab
Has never heard of Auden, has to ask
*Gasthaus* directions, but we find him there
Ten yards away and settled with his slab,

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The bracketed dates, the modest designation,
His plot planted to suffocation
In the country style of *horror vacui*.

Close by, a granite soldier stands
Bareheaded, bowed, without a gun,
Wearing his empty cartridge belt,
A blunt reminder of the First World War,
Signed *Unseren Helden* for those villagers
Who never returned and lay somewhere in France
*Entre deux guerres* before the next
World War should be begun
By the ultimate twentieth century hun.

Far from his foggy isle
The poet rests in self-exile.
Earth of the great composers of the wordless art
Enshrouds this master of the English tune
Not many miles from where Beethoven scrawled his will
When he could no longer hear the trill
Of the little yellow-hammer, nor the titanic storm.
In such a place Dame Kind
Released the intellectual minstrel's form.

Across the *Audenstrasse* from the grave
A bee drops from the chestnut, sips my beer,
Brings back his image to me, on a day
I bought him a tin collapsible cup to sip
His whiskey from, on some Iowa train,
Knowing his dread of that vertiginous plain.
Now all is comfy in his delectable cave
I scatter the bee and greet him with my lip.

Whatever commentators come to say —
That life was not your bag —Edwardian —
Misogynist — Greenwich Villager —
Drifter —coward — traitorous clerk — or you,
In your own language, genteel anti-Jew —

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I come to bless this plot where you are lain,
Poet who made poetry whole again.

Sandwiched between two families Auden lies,
At last one of the locals, over his grave
A cross, a battle monument, and a name
History will polish to a shine.
Down in the valley hums the Autobahn,
Up here the poet lies sleeping in a vale
That has no exits. All the same,
Right on target and just in time
A NATO fighter rips open the skies
Straight over Auden's domus and is gone.

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*Charles Simic*

## A Series Of Fortuitous Circumstances

Like a busy street scene
Reflected in a butcher's window:
Trimmed head of a large pig
Taking the place of your own—

With a black hat and an umbrella—
Since it's raining softly
On the soup bones, the blood puddings—
Or are they bare legs and knees?

Some young war widow saving her
Black stocking for tonight's date. . . .
In the meantime, both of you blurring,
A sprig of parsley behind the ear.

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*Portfolio*

# Portraits

## Llyn Foulkes

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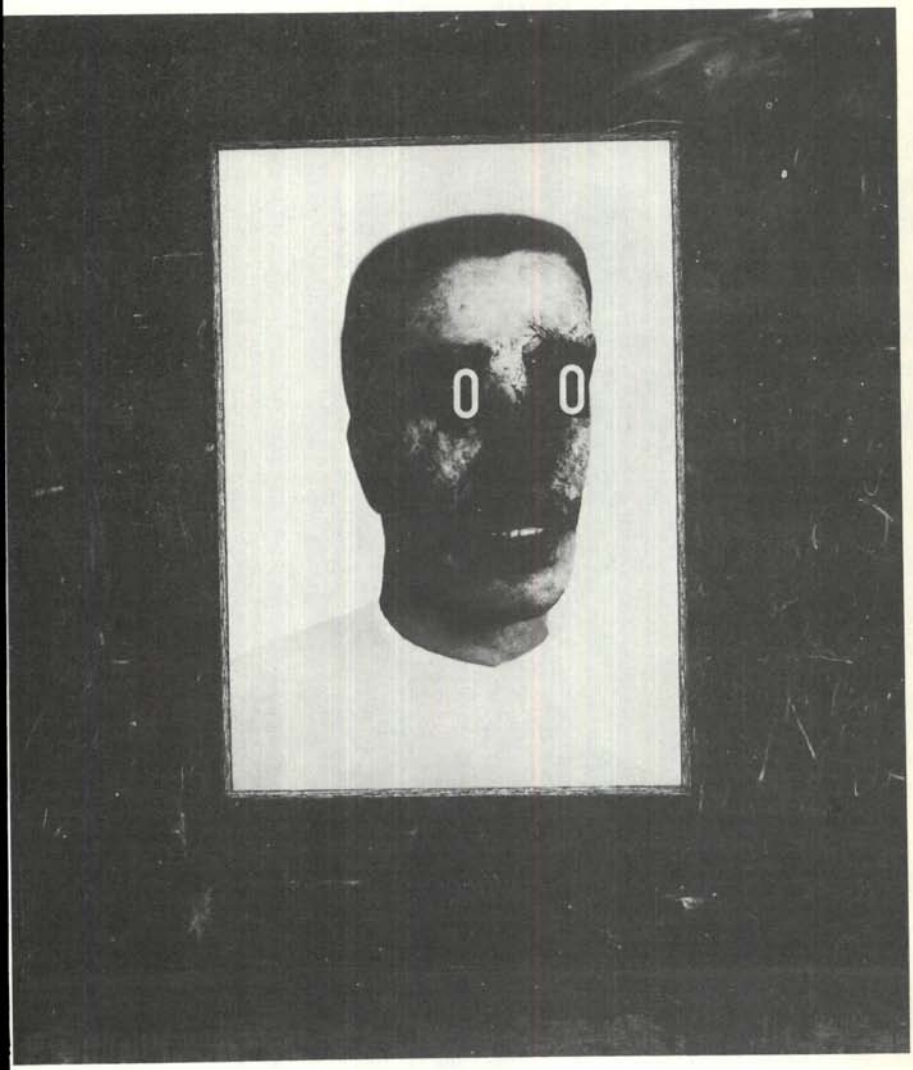

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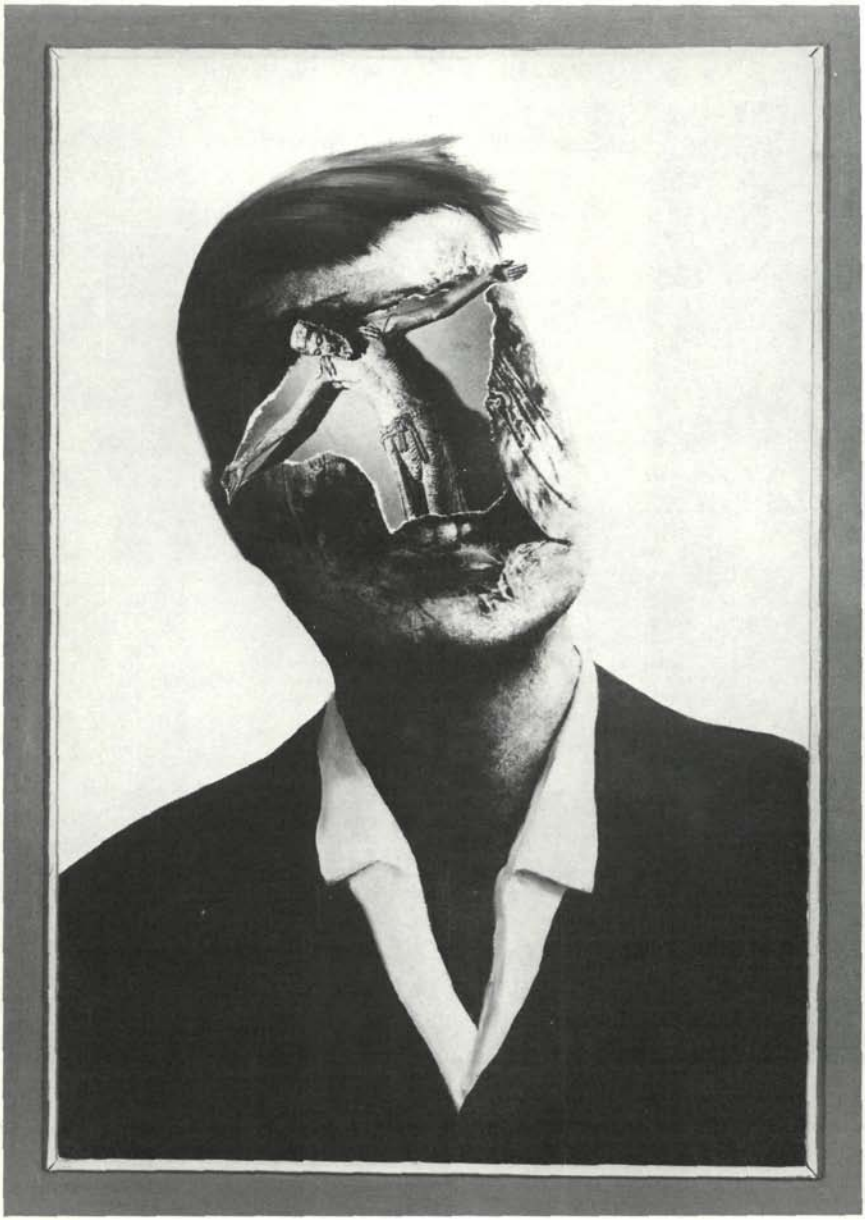

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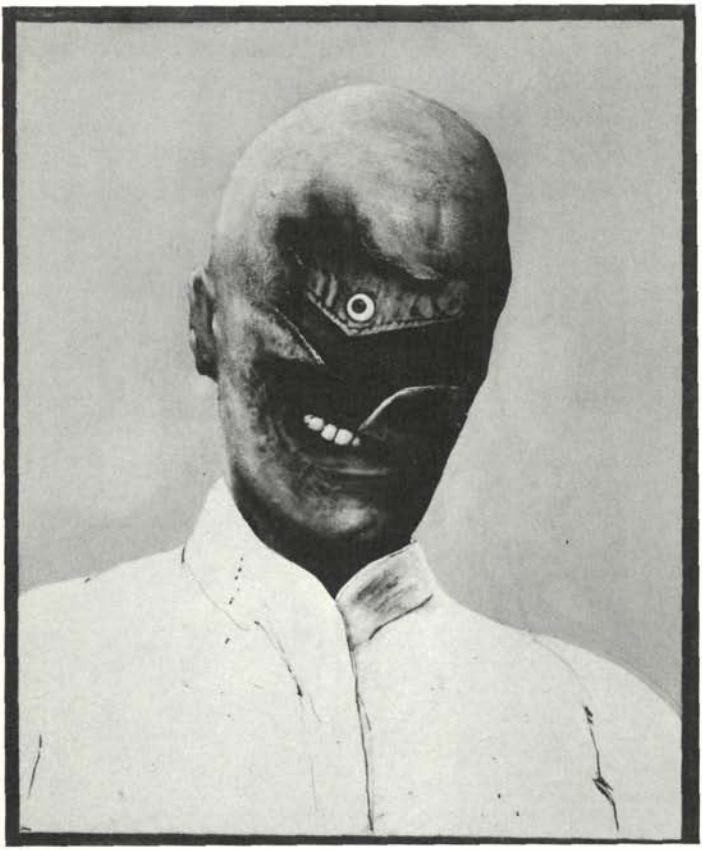

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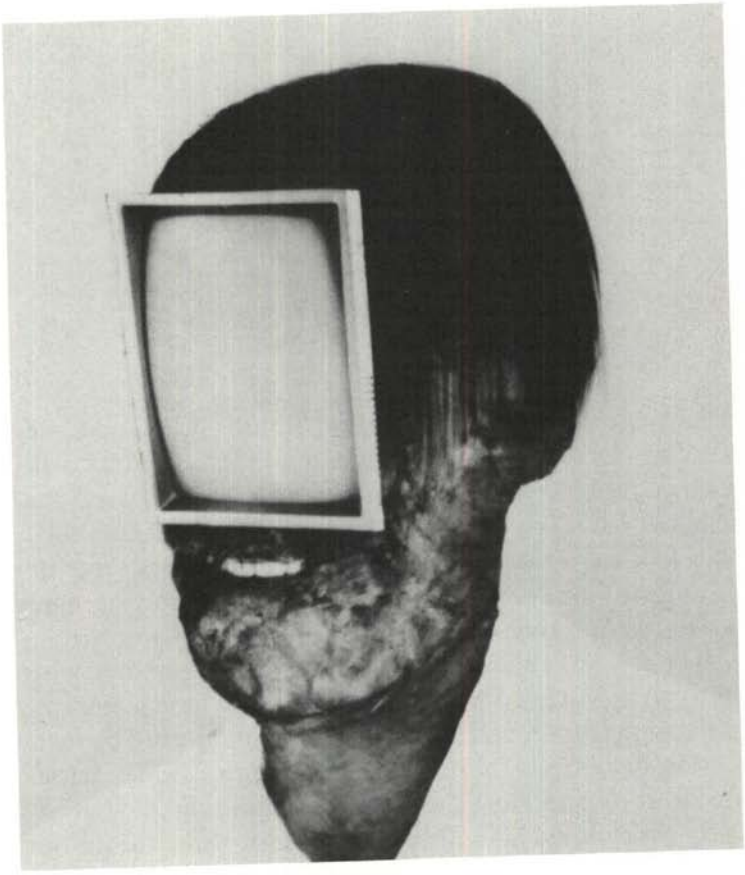

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# Connie Bronson

## Marilynne Robinson

I had one friend named Connie Bronson who lived two houses up the street from me and was one year younger than I and two grades behind because she had had brain fever. She had blood-red hair and a freckle-spattered face, and was called Bones by the boys at school, who regarded her with intense loathing and in bad weather often spent whole recesses devising other, more terrible epithets for her.

All of this was a source of great sorrow to her mother, who took a job in a drugstore so that Connie could have piano and tap-dancing lessons, and gave parties for her on every pretext, ordering huge cakes from the bakery encrusted with coarse, dusty frosting and blowsy sugar-roses, calling the mothers of each of the children in Connie's class to be sure that the parties were well-attended.

She had once even bought the girl a pony which, since her means were limited, was very old and sickly and ill-tempered, and was put up for sale again a few weeks later because it bit Connie's hand, breaking her little finger, which, though it was set and re-set, healed veering outward at the first knuckle. This, of course, cast a shadow over those of her mother's hopes

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that rested with the piano lessons, and provided another theme for the inventions of the little boys at school.

Connie, however, cared about none of this, meeting hatred with hatred as intense, yet of another order, preoccupied and entirely self-possessed. She apparently accepted the world as hostile and decided to conform herself to it without defensiveness or apology—even with a sort of detachment. In the spring and summer she never left her house without a large glass jar with holes punched in the lid, into which she put bees most commonly, but also spiders, ants, butterflies and grasshoppers. The jar was always in her hand, and often at odd moments she would study its tattered and languishing contents, then give the jar a thorough shaking and go on with what she had been doing. Sometimes, looking me full in the face with the same impersonal calm, she would pinch my arm until I hit her hard enough to make her stop, and then we could be on good terms again, as if she had only felt that the lawfulness she had discovered in things must now and then be reconfirmed.

We remained friends, however, only until the summer I was nine. I remember one morning very early in the spring of that year when the earth in the garden had just begun to soften and there was still snow in the woods across the river and in all the ditches and gullies, when Connie came walking across the Simpsons' back yard, which lay between ours and hers. I could tell that she had left the house without waking her mother, because her clothing, which was usually buckled, snapped, tied, belted and suspended in every way her mother could contrive to make it stay on her thin body and in place, was hanging loose and pulling apart, her shirttails out and her anklets already disappearing under her heels. And although it was chilly enough so that the overalls that my grandmother had left on the clothesline overnight swung heavily in the wind and rasped when they touched, Connie wore only a scarlet sweater tied around her neck by its sleeves, like a cape.

We had planned together, the afternoon of the day before, when it had been almost warm, to get up early that day, a Saturday, and go down to the river because the snow would surely be off the banks and there might even be tadpoles or

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minnows in one of the pools—planning it all as we walked along from school beneath branches as barren-looking as roots with the earth shaken out of them, carrying our coats and scarves because the afternoon was bright and warm, except when the wind blew.

That was the first time I had ever gone to the river without Gil or August or my grandmother, although it ran so near our house that we always heard the sound of it, loud in the evenings after supper when Gil and August smoked their pipes on the back step and I played with Connie or alone at the foot of the garden, imagining sometimes that I would climb over the fence into the deep grass of the gully and cross the road and follow the steep little path on the other side through the trees and bushes, until I came to where the river shone among the lucid shadowed places, or glittered dimly as it swelled and broke over the rocks in its channel.

The windows of my room overlooked the river, and in warm weather, when they were left open, it seemed even louder and nearer, and as I lay waiting to fall asleep I thought I could hear every sound, even the smallest, of frogs and mosquitoes and katydids, and of the leaves of the branches that dabbled in the water, flicked by its current. On those nights the river often suggested dreams to me. But my dreams and imaginings always ended at the same place, with my having come to the river but only standing beside it or looking down on it from the bridge. Or they blended with one of the stories Connie's mother told us when she explained to us why we must never go there except with an older person.

It was very dangerous, she said, and it was, because the river was quite deep and ran between banks of large, heaped and broken rocks in places where trees grew down close to the water and nearly met above it, keeping a constant damp shade among themselves in which ferns thrived, and skunk cabbage and huckleberries, and in which moss overgrew the ground and the rocks, stringy and slick at the brink of the water. Many children had been lost there when they came alone to fish or swim or gather berries and slipped off the rocks and were pulled away from the bank by the slow, strong current, shouting perhaps but no

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one would hear them, or if he did hear would not come, thinking it was only the crickets or a catbird (for sometimes I would think I heard someone calling from the river when no one else was awake, and wait until morning to ask August, who always said it was only a catbird, and would take me to the river to show me that no one was there). Or if their friends were there and saw them fall, and reached and shouted to them, they were pulled away nevertheless, to be settled on the smooth brown sand against a rock where eddying water tugged at their clothing and stirred in their hair possessively, low-voiced and tranquil, until someone at last came and saw, beneath the quiet surface speckled with pollen and pricked by water-striders, the vivid blue of a dress or sweater, and lifted the child out again.

My grandmother and Aunt Rosalie used to say that Alice had liked to go to the river alone, because she would go there in the morning or late in the evening when they thought she was in her room. I used to wonder if she really did like the river, and what she found to do when she got there. There were ranks of boats on the dresser in her room, carved by August after the engravings of sleek Phoenician vessels and Viking ships he found in my grandfather's history books, perfect to the ringed shields mounted on their sides. But she never sailed any of them, since they might be lost or broken. My grandmother said Alice liked to pull petals off the roses and drop them into the water from the bridge or scatter bread crumbs and watch the fish rise for them. But I used to think that she did not like the river at all, and would not have gone, certainly not alone, except that sometimes she thought she heard someone crying there, too, and went down by herself to see. The stories of lost children were told and retold, and she must have heard them, and wondered about them while she lay in her bed and listened to the hushed incessant river, as I did.

But that Saturday was disappointing. I watched Connie from the kitchen window as she walked unevenly across the clumps of stiff grass, shadowless in the gray morning, and went to the door to open it for her as noiselessly as possible, since it was not yet six and everyone in the house would be sleeping for another hour.

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("Hi, Connie," I whispered.

"Do you still want to go?"

"Why not?"

She stretched her sweater down over her thin arms. "It isn't very warm out."

"You should've brought a coat."

"It's too cold anyhow." And she seated herself on one of the chairs at the kitchen table. "I bet the river has ice on it."

"We could wait a little while, till it's warmer."

Connie shrugged. "What's in the sack?"

"Sandwiches."

"I brought cake." She placed a bag beside mine on the table. "Let's eat 'em here."

"You said you wanted to go to the river with me."

"Yeah, but I didn't say I wanted to *freeze* to death." Connie had opened the bag of sandwiches and was judiciously pulling one of them into ragged halves. "If I took a chill I could get sick again, you know," she said sententiously, gazing at me as she licked jam from a skeletal finger.

"I could loan you my coat," I said. "Wait, I know what!" I went to the door of the pantry and reached up into the metal box nailed to the doorframe, in which wooden matches were kept, and spread a dozen of them over my open hand, for Connie to see.

"Your grandma'll kill you," she said, but she was interested.

"She won't find out."

"My mom'll kill both of us." She reached out and took one of the matches and examined it closely. "Butchie Witherspoon can light one of these with his thumbnail."

"So can Gil. I lit one once on the heel of my shoe."

"Anybody can do that." She scratched at the head with her own nail twice ineffectually, wincing each time, expecting flame to burst up. "Got any marshmallows?"

"I don't know."

"We do.")

And after that we went to the river whenever we could, almost every Saturday morning, and gradually built a fort against

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a mass of rocks, its perimeters delineated by more small rocks laid in an enclosing semicircle, and provisioned it with a candy bar and some band-aids and the remaining matches, all buried in a coffee can, the digging up and reburying of which constituted most of the activity in the fort.

Then as it became really warm Connie began to smuggle glass jars down to the bank until she had seven in a row against the outcropping. These she called "the dungeons" and kept filled by squatting at the edge of the water long, patient minutes—until a school of minnows came by, dusky black against the yellow-brown bottom when they passed into the sunshine—holding a jar which suddenly merged with its reflection and drew up a few of them just before they disappeared into the shadows again with a sudden, simultaneous quirk of their tails. She caught frogs, too, and butterflies, and whatever else she could trap and bottle, all of which she roasted with inquisitorial thoroughness over small fires.

I did not like the things that Connie did at the river and more than once I thought of smashing the seven jars and throwing the can of matches into the water. I even dreamed that I was with August at the beach, which was rubbled, in the dream, with blackened but still hinged and jointed bones, huge leg bones and spines and antennae, and that August was amazed, and kept stooping to pick up one after another, working it in his fingers as he asked me, "What is this? and what is this? and what is this?" while I waited, sick with guilt, for him to look at them a little more closely and know.

However, if I did not allow her to make the fires and continue the persecutions I doubted that she would come any more, at least with me. So I sat around, spooning little caves in the damp sand or rinsing stones to see what colors were in them when they were wet, ignoring her most of the time, except once when I retrieved a frog which had somehow slipped away and was limping past me toward the water, weary and strangely awry after the fashion of those of her victims that were called pets for a while and were given a name and subjected to a protracted handling before being commended to the flames. I picked him

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up and took him back to her, and it was that night when I dreamed that I came to the river with August and found the charred bones.

One day, however, after Connie had crouched jar in hand at one place and then another along the bank with diminishing patience, she finally came over to me and said, "I can't catch anything."

"I can't catch anything."

"You've already caught them all."

"No, I haven't. I saw some tadpoles, but they were out in the middle where I couldn't reach 'em."

"Probably everything will stay out there till they get farther down the river."

Connie looked thoughtful. "I know! I could catch them when they come out from under the bridge."

"You couldn't even reach the water from the bridge."

"Yes, I can. I'll show you."

So we went to the bridge, built jointly by my great grandfather and the man who owned the land on the other side when there were still only a few houses around ours. It was low and level, resting close above the river on squat, solid beams, and floored with beams also, several inches apart so that you cold see down between them darkness and gleams of water, but nevertheless sturdy enough to support a wagon or even a car. There were also handrails perhaps four feet high, with vertical members at close intervals, all designed to keep children from falling over the sides.

Connie and I walked out onto the bridge, she scrutinizing the railing from the inside, then hoisting herself up, hanging across the top rail on her ribs so that she could look at the bridge's outer side and the water, her brows drawn together in her absorption with some undisclosed plan.

I watched her waving, balancing legs with apprehension. "You're going to fall over."

"No I won't."

"I told you you couldn't reach far enough."

"Yes I can." She dropped down beside me again. "Hold that," she said, and put the jar into my hands. I started to follow her

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to the end of the bridge, but she told me to go back to the middle and wait, so I did. She went around the end, and taking hold of the vertical boards under the railing, stepped from the bank onto the narrow ledge and pulled herself almost upright. Then she began to move gradually toward me, leaning out sideways over the water.

"Oh, Connie, don't," I pleaded. "Go back. You're going to drown!" But she was intent on her stratagem and did not answer. In a few moments she was opposite me, already looking down over her shoulder into the water for signs of prey.

"I think I see a baby perch," she said. "It's something pretty big. Give me that jar."

I pressed the jar to the space between two of the boards, and then between several more, though they were all of equal width. "It won't fit through." So I set it on top of the railing. But Connie had slowly crouched down to the water, and held herself there by one hand. "Give it to me," she said, indifferent to the difficulties involved.

After some hesitation, I boosted myself up onto the railing as she had done, balancing on my stomach as I reached the jar down to her. She seemed to have forgotten about it entirely. "Look at that," she said, pointing to a stationary shadow in a sunlit place, near the sand. "I bet that's a trout."

"It's too big to fit in the jar. It's too far down."

"I wish I had a fishing pole."

"Why don't you take the jar," I asked, short of breath and a little uneasy.

Connie bent down, taking a lower and lower grip on the railing. She struck the water with her hand and laughed as the fish glided away.

"Take the jar if you want it," I said.

She looked up at me with a sudden, calm interest. "Are you scared?"

"No."

"Yes you are." Reaching up as if for the jar she took hold of my wrist instead, and pulled me a little farther over, toward the water.

I remember my reflection in the water pulling into bright

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segments and merging again. "Connie, let go. Please, Connie! If you don't, I'll tell! I really will!" I was looking past her into the dark, cold water, already hearing pressure in my ears and worrying about the weight of my shoes, which would hold me perhaps just inches from the bright air—convinced that I would surely fall in, because the sense of falling had been so real that the fact seemed inevitable.

But Connie's mother had heard my shrieking from her backyard and came running down the bank calling, "Stay where you are! Don't move, Connie, Mother's coming." So Connie released my hand and began to edge along the bridge to the opposite bank, stepping into water waist deep and wading up the side while Mrs. Bronson called, "No, darling! You'll get a chill," white and distraught, out of breath with her running. She had stopped halfway across the bridge near where I stood brushing splinters out of the front of my dress, and she put out her hand and caressed my hair and my neck and shoulder absently at first, with a slight, cool touch, saying, "You could have both drowned. It's a wonder you didn't." Then her fingers gripped my shoulder and she began to shake me a little. "*You* don't have any excuse," she said. "You're a big girl. You know perfectly well why you're not supposed to play down here. Don't you?" Connie had stopped a little distance away to pull up a sodden anklet and examine a mark on her knee, while Mrs. Bronson looked at me with weary, tearful, angry eyes and shook me again to show that she expected an answer. I said yes, I knew why, but by then Mrs. Bronson had knelt on the bridge in front of Connie and was chafing her wet legs with her skirt, saying "Oh, Connie, why do you do these things? Is it just to make me worry?" while Connie removed and replaced the pins that held her mother's coiled hair.

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# In the Water-Butt

## Ezra Pound

*Pound, c. 1908–10.*

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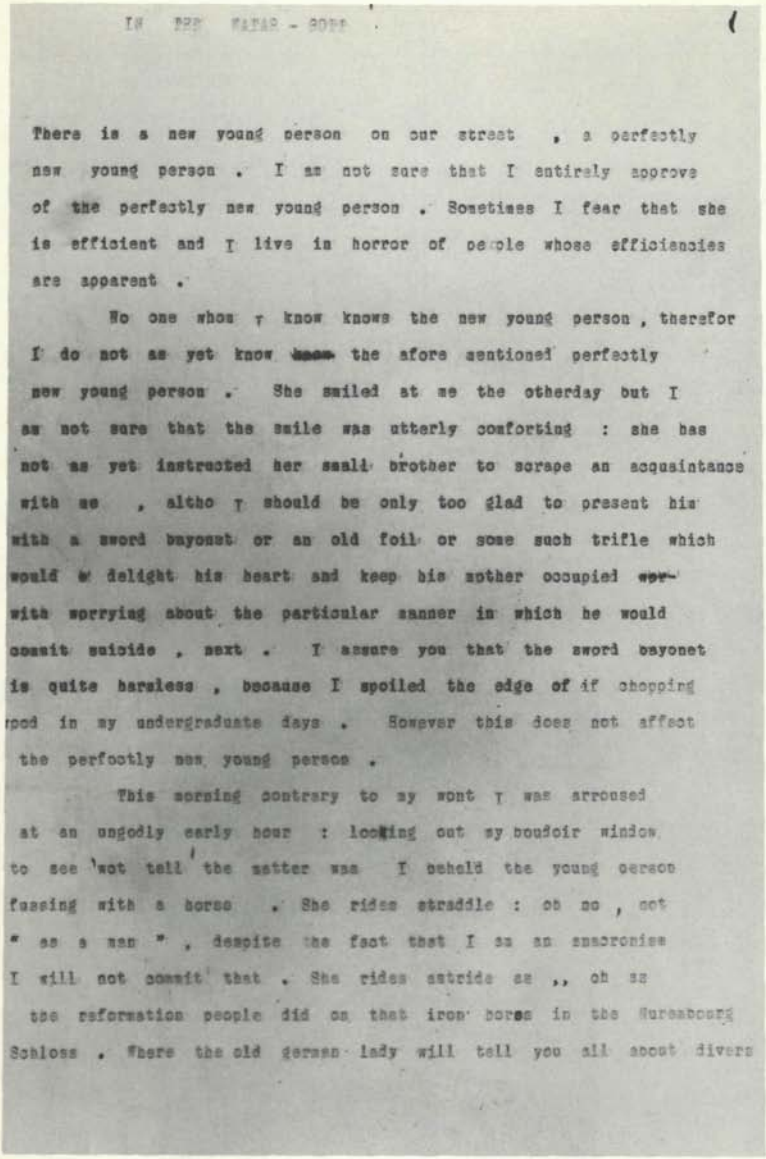

There is a new young person on our street , a perfectly new young person . I am not sure that I entirely approve of the perfectly new young person . Sometimes I fear that she is efficient and I live in horror of people whose efficiencies are apparent .

No one whom I know knows the new young person , therefor I do not as yet know ~~them~~ the afore mentioned perfectly new young person . She smiled at me the otherday but I am not sure that the smile was utterly comforting : she has not as yet instructed her small brother to scrape an acquaintance with me , altho I should be only too glad to present him with a sword bayonet or an old foil or some such trifle which would ~~w~~ delight his heart and keep his mother occupied ~~wor~~ with worrying about the particular manner in which he would commit suicide , next . I assure you that the sword bayonet is quite harmless , because I spoiled the edge of it chopping rpod in my undergraduate days . However this does not affect the perfectly new young person .

This morning contrary to my wont I was arroused at an ungodly early hour : looking out my boudoir window to see what tell the matter was I beheld the young person fussing with a horse . She rides straddle : oh no , not " as a man " , despite the fact that I am an anachronism I will not commit that . She rides astride as ,, oh as the reformation people did on that iron horse in the Heidelberg Schloss . There the old german lady will tell you all about divers

*Facsimile of the original Pound manuscript, as found in Yale University's Beinecke Library. There is some doubt as to whether Pound was the actual typist. "He may have gotten someone to do it for him," James Laughlin observes. "His typing was never this neat."*

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varieties of spikings and slicings , pointing out the pincers and pot-hooks and varified instruments of nipping , and ~~with~~ after describing certain processes whereby a human was dissected and bisected and multisected into ~~an~~ sanguiniferous hash and then scorched to a frazzle, and ~~of~~ with " Dnd day Daniel killed been , TEND " .

The young person to my horror was not content with saddling her destrier . She rubbed him with heathen implisents and poked his feet and smeared black stuff on ~~a~~ his nails , pardon hooves " .

After these complications ( I fear she is efficient after all ) she bestrode the beast and disappeared around her house . , moment later she clattered down the concrete driveway and was gone .

I had not decided whether or no I liked her seat when I was again disturbed by the 'clonk-tap' of a horse moving , I arose again in order that I might further ~~observe~~ observe her manner of sitting a nag," for " thought I " the young person has forgotten something , and no wonder considering that it is quite impossible that any one should be fully awake at this hour of the day (" day " strictly by courtecusy )

The sight which met me was not pleasing . It was another young person with clothes to match its horse . He also clanked up the drive and disappeared . As he did not reapear either on the pearch or at the stables I conclude he hid himself somewhere in the shade of the kitchen .

He had been out of sight for at least ~~for~~ fourty seconds when I was distressed by more hoof-sweets form the other direction " Heavens ! " said I to the wall , with unusual restraint

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" is this our erst-while quiet neighbourhood to be turned into a SORRAL or a horse-pound , simply because the new young person arises at midnight . .

It was however the young person her self and no new comer , She sulked at the turn of the road ( it is below a high wall and terrace and curves in a quarter-circle ) . For some four minutes and I awaited developments . The young centaur evidently slept somewhere in the region of the back-door , at least he remained invisible . She departed but her the new young person. expression was less in tune with the " morning " wind .

" Ass " said I " here is fine food for the worms of tragedy , I will garb myself and descend against her next returning and thereby out of the infinite kindness of my heart spare these two young innocents much grief and lamentation , much dole and bitter tears . There is already enough sun light for me to read by and I will peruse the morning paper , or haply if it have not yet come ( and it hadn't ) I will ensconce my soul in Sordello , that it may seem as if my custom to arise with the dawn and fill my belly with the east wind and my mind with goodly instruction . This will also give me opportunity to become distantly acquainted with the new young person , who despite her apparent efficiency has very nice hair ."

With such benevolence at heart I arrayed myself in what may by the tolerance be termed clothing and descended .

The thermometer had fallen thirty degrees in the night , I opened to that sublime line of Browning's

" And a cat's in the water-butt "

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( Mesmerism , stanza 8 ) .

Thereafter I shivered in my tennis [illegible] for half an hour , even untill the bearer of morning news was in sight ,at which time ( the perfectly new young person having shown no signs of returing ", I should have gone into the house had not the person with clothes to match his horse come out of the drive way .

I arose and whistled at him . " She came back while you were back of the house , You have missed her , She has gone "

" Hath she on north-back ? Which way did she go ? "
Now if this cub had possessed a spark of sense he would first have gone to the stables to see whether her horse was there , if there he would have prepared it for her riding and if gone he would have already deduced that it's mistress was aboard . Also the [illegible] lisp irritated me ( a lisp after a half hour's freezing in a July morning breeze is utterly inexcussable , if his teeth had chattered I could have sympathized ) .

As it was I made a severe full-arm gesture toward the north-west .and remarked scornfully " No ! when I beheld her she was mounted on the sacred white elephant of the Shajmatemi and attended by half the retinue of the Sahib Maltonmerak ."
He did not thank me . and I continued addressing the place where he had been " And y farther more young man , If you would watch and wait in a sensible place instead of trying to sponge a breakfast from her cook ,( who if she is up is certainly in no pleasant mood at this time of night )

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you would be less of a nuisance to Miss ... ah to Miss .
to ah your ~~#~~ friend and myself .

As he was already out of sight it made very
~~--They~~ little difference what I said . They have not come back
yet : either of them .

But I have relieved my feelings by writing to a teacher's
agency explaining the relation of divers things in heaven
and in earth ; notably that I am not competing with the
Chinesse and that I decline to part with the fruits of
my learning for less than the wage of a carpenter's
apprentice . I do ~~yet~~ to wit moreover that I have no
especial desire to instruct the budding ides in the art of
shooting teutonic grammar or in tracing the interstices
of the grecian verb , but it is written that man shall not
live by verse alone .

I shall however sharpen that sword-bayonet before I present
it to her younger brother .

( signed ) Geofry Stowell

Ezra Pound

Wyncote Pa .

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# Walking Around A Water-Butt

## James Laughlin

*Water-butt: A large open-headed cask set up on end to receive the rain-water from a roof.* (O.E.D.)

Pound always set his sights high. Nothing but the best. When I was studying with him at his "Ezuversity" in Rapallo in 1935 he advised me not to waste time trying to write stories. Stendhal, Flaubert, James, Ford and Joyce, he told me, had done all that could be done with the novel. They had finished it off. Ne plus ultra. Reading with enjoyment, but not with admiration, his early story, "In the Water-Butt," which has slumbered for seventy years in his files and now in the Pound Archive at Yale's Beinecke Library, I see how right he was—at least in his own case. In an arch way the sketch has a certain charm but it hardly advances the art of fiction. Yet it does give insight into what "Ra," as he was then called, was like when he was a graduate student in Romance Languages at Penn. He comes through as exuberant, cocky—and sophomoric. Still, there are flashes of better things to come. There are fore-

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shadowings of certain kinds of humor which would turn up in the comic poems in *Personae* or in his autobiographical *Indiscretions*. And there are tones in the story which point toward the lingo of his fabulously funny letters.

The typescript at the Beinecke is not dated, but Pound's bibliographer Donald Gallup deduces from the typing that "The Water-Butt" was written in 1907. There is no mention of it in Pound's letters to his parents, to whom he usually reported what he was doing. This may confirm the year at Penn, when he was living at home in Wyncote, near Philadelphia. (Pound does speak later in the family letters of a novel which he destroyed.) There is nothing about "The Water-Butt" in Noel Stock's 1970 biography nor in the extensive new research which Humphrey Carpenter has done for his forthcoming book on Pound. But in scanning Stock I came on a passage which could refer to it. Stock quotes from a letter Pound wrote to his friend L. Burton Hessler in 1907 in which he said, ". . . Am preparing a little booklet of satire that may amuse you slightly. It is a teeny weeny bit caustic in places but you won't mind, and the world is so very ridiculous that one can scarcely help smiling now and then." "Satire . . . ridiculous . . . smiling," that might be "The Water-Butt."

The title of the piece is from Browning, a line in his poem "Mesmerism," one of the "dramatic romances."

> All I believed is true!
> I am able yet
> All I want, to get
> By a method as strange as new:
> Dare I trust the same to you?
> If at night, when doors are shut,
> And the wood-worm picks,
> And the death-watch ticks
> And the bar has a flag of smut,
> And a cat's in the water-butt—
> . . . .
> If since eve drew in, I say,
> I have sat and brought

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(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey—

And so on for twenty-seven rheumy-rhymey stanzas . . .

In 1909, when he was so beguiled by Browning,* Pound responded with his own "Mesmerism," using the waterlogged cat for his epigraph:

## Mesmerism

*"And a cat's in the water-butt."*—Robert Browning

Aye you're a man that! ye old mesmerizer
Tyin' your meanin' in seventy swadelin's,
One must of needs be a hang'd early riser
To catch you at worm turning. Holy Odd's body-kins!

"Cat's i' the water butt!" Thought's in your verse-barrel,
Tell us this thing rather, then we'll believe you,
You, Master Bob Browning, spite your apparel
Jump to your sense and give praise as we'd lief do.

You wheeze as a head-cold long-tonsilled Calliope,
But God! what a sight you ha' got o' our in'ards,
Mad as a hatter but surely no Myope,
Broad as all ocean and leanin' man-kin'ards.

Heart that was big as the bowels of Vesuvius,
Words that were wing'd as her sparks in eruption,
Eagled and thundered as Jupiter Pluvius,
Sound in your wind past all signs o' corruption.

Here's to you, Old Hippety-Hop o' the accents,
True to the Truth's sake and crafty dissector,

* The best discussion of the Pound/Browning connection is George Bornstein's essay "Pound's Parlayings with Robert Browning" in the symposium *Ezra Pound Among the Poets* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

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You grabbed at the gold sure; had no need to pack
cents
Into your versicles.
Clear sight's elector!

As George Bornstein has pointed out: "Couched in the form, language and meters of Browning, the poem identifies those characteristics of Browning's poetry which Pound admired and sought to adapt for his own verses." Three years ago, when I was interviewing Pound's friend the poet Basil Bunting for Lawrence Pitkethly's documentary, Bunting remarked that Pound was about forty years behind in his poetic taste when he came to London in 1908. Browning, Rossetti, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson and Bliss Carman were some of his early models. It was not until about 1912, when he had read Yeats and Ford Madox Ford had ridiculed his archaic and stilted language that he began to write in an idiom which might be called modern. In "The Water-Butt" Pound writes that "I will ensconce my soul in *Sordello*, that it may seem as if my custom to arise with the dawn and fill my belly with the east wind and my mind with goodly instruction." (An odd bit of syntax.)

As late as 1918, Pound was saying that Browning's *Sordello* was "the best long poem in English since Chaucer." It is the saga of a thirteenth-century Italian troubadour, who figures in Dante's *Inferno*, a vast historical tapestry which runs to one hundred and sixty pages of somewhat constipated rhymed couplets.

> Who will, may hear Sordello's story told:
> His story? Who believes me shall behold
> The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,
> Like me . . .

Can anyone read the whole poem now? But Pound found many wonders in it. He admired Browning particularly for the invention of the dramatic monologue, a form which he transmuted to his own *personae* (masks), a means for giving a poem a speaking voice which was not his own. "Marvoil," in which

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he impersonates the troubadour Arnaut de Mareuil, is a good example.

As Pound began to plan the *Cantos* he believed he would need a *persona* for them. His choice was Sordello. The first *Cantos* to be published were drafts of I-III in *Poetry* magazine in 1917. They were totally different from the final versions of 1925, both in content and style. Poundians call them the *Ur-Cantos*. *Ur-Canto* I begins:

> Hang it all, there can be but one "*Sordello*,"
> But say I want to, say I take your whole bag of tricks,
> Let in your quirks and tweeks, and say the thing's an art-form,
> Your "*Sordello*," and that the "modern world"
> Needs such a rag-bag to stuff all its thoughts in;
> Say that I dump my catch, shiny and silvery
> As fresh sardines flapping and slipping on the marginal cobbles?

These lines are not the lovely melopoeic cadences of the revised and later cantos. They are jerky and tentative. It's unfortunate that Pound spoke of a "rag-bag." Ever since, his detractors have been saying that the poem has no proper structure and is indeed a "rag-bag" into which he stuffed everything that he knew, saw, read, heard or remembered. This is not so. There is a structure but it is extremely intricate and hard to discern. At some point, Pound concluded that a single mask-voice would not do the job for him. The revised Canto I has a single voice, that of Odysseus going down to the underworld, the *nekuya*, but soon the poem becomes polyphonic (as well as polylingual) with many voices collaged closely together. As Hugh Kenner explains it, the poem becomes a "mental kaleidoscope ('the phantasticon') . . . The man talking [gives] place to rapidly dissolving images."

Poor Sordello! He got the heave-ho. But he still has three lines at the beginning of revised Canto II, and, perhaps to make amends, Pound gives him what sounds like some pleasant fornication in Canto XXIX: "And Sordello subtracted her from that husband/And lay with her in Tarviso."

What a poet writes in his youth is never entirely lost. Many of Dylan Thomas's greatest lines came from the notebook which

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he kept in school. Did Pound salvage anything or learn anything from "The Water-Butt"? Nothing of substance. But in matters of verbal tone and style there may be survivals. A good place to look is in the collection of pieces in lighter vein, *Pavannes and Divagations*, which he put together when he was "a guest of the government" in St. Elizabeths Hospital in 1958.

Pound refused all offers from publishers to write his autobiography. He told me: "When a man writes his meeemoires that's a sign that he's finished." But in 1923 he published a fifty-page account of the lives of his progenitors which is a delightful social document, full of witty Ezratic divagations. All of the family names were changed. Pound's father, Homer, is Rip Weight, his mother is Hermione. There is a colorful Uncle Euripides out in Wisconsin, while Ezra refers to himself as "the infant Gargantua." The style has little nips of Henry James, whom Pound read attentively, but I think I also hear in it a touch of the cantering pace of "The Water-Butt":

> Before the birth of the infant Gargantua, the great elephant Sampson broke loose from the travelling circus, and upset the lion cages and chased his keeper out of the tent; and his keeper jumped on his cayoos and put for the railroad siding, and you could have seen the cowboys out after it, letting off their six-shooters into its rear.

Also in *Pavannes* is the tale of Jodindranath Mawhwor:

> The soul of Jodindranath Mawhwor clove to the God of this universe and he meditated the law of the Shastras. . . .
>
> Jodindranath rose in the morning and brushed his teeth, after having performed other unavoidable duties as prescribed in the sutra, and he applied to his body a not excessive, as he considered it, amount of unguents and perfumes. He then blackened his eyebrows, drew faint lines under his eyes, put a fair deal of rouge on his lips, and regarded himself in a mirror. Then having chewed a few betel leaves to perfume his breath, and munched another bonne-bouche of perfume, he set about his day's business.

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Fairly close, I think, to the arch intonation of "The Water-Butt." The "Frivolities" section of *Pavannes* exhibits various strains of Pound's humor. The one which relates most in tone to "The Water-Butt" is "Our Contemporaries":

> When the Taihaitian princess
> Heard that he had decided,
> She rushed out into the sunlight and swarmed up a
> cocoanut palm tree,
> But he returned to this island
> And wrote ninety Petrarchan sonnets.

A more ambitious poem whose tone may connect remotely with "The Water-Butt" is "Redondillas, or Something of that Sort." Pound had the poem set up by Elkin Mathews as part of his London book *Canzoni* of 1911. But when he saw it in proof he decided that it was insufficiently serious and withdrew it. Fifty-four years later, when the text surfaced in the Humanities Research Center at Texas, he allowed me to publish it, but with the stipulation that it appear only in a limited edition.

> I would sing the American people,
> God send them some civilization;
> I would sing of the nations of Europe,
> God grant them some method of cleansing
> The fetid extent of their evils.
> I would sing of my love "To-morrow,"
> But Yeats has written an essay,
> Why should I stop to repeat it?
> I don't like this hobbledy metre
> but find it easy to write in,
> I would sing to the tune of "*Mi platz*"
> were it not for the trouble of rhyming,
> Besides, not six men believe me
> when I sing in a beautiful measure.
> I demonstrate the breadth of my vision.
> I am bored by this talk of the tariff,
> I too have heard of T. Roosevelt.

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I have met with the "Common Man,"
I admit that he usually bores me,
He is usually stupid or smug.

The redondilla is a 16th-century octosyllabic quatrain, which Pound would have known from his college studies, but he does not follow it here. The bouncing "hobbledy metre," as he calls it, is not one which he used in any other poem.

The archaisms. Pound loved them, perhaps out of reverence for the past. In the first poem of *Personae*, "The Tree," which he wrote for his Bryn Mawr sweetheart Hilda Doolittle (later to become, at his fiat, the first Imagist poet, H. D.), we find:

Of Daphne and the laurel bow
And that god-feasting couple old
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.

Archaic words keep turning up until Ford gives him the dressing down about it, and even sometimes after that. In Canto I of 1925 he still writes "I dug the ell-square pitkin" and "Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever / For soothsay." The archaisms are really most disconcerting in the translations of troubadour *cansos* and the sonnets of the Italian poets of the *dolce stil nuovo* where he had to use them to find enough rhyming sounds for the extremely complicated rhyme schemes.

Death who art haught, the wretched's remedy,
Grace! Grace! hands joined I do beseech it thee,
Come, see and conquer for worse things on me
Are launched by love. My senses that did live,

Consumèd are and quenched, and e'en in this place
Where I was galliard, now I see that I am
Fallen away, and where my steps I misplace,
Fall pain and grief; to open tears I nigh am.

Cavalcanti: *Sonetto XXXIII*

I asked my guru, Professor A. Walton Litz, about "The Water-Butt." "What is this anyway?" "It's undergraduate humor," he said, "the brightest kid in the class showing off that he has read things." "What things? Is it any particular parody?" "Hard to

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say . . . but at that time Booth Tarkington was in the air." In one of the family letters Pound reports that he has been reading Gilbert Parker, a Canadian author popular at the time.

Campus high spirits. Fun and games with word play. Let's be outrageous. Let's reach for esoteric words and twist them to make them ludicrous. Flamboyance. Pomposity. An *absurdité voulue*. Fancy punning. Some highbrow camp that descends to kitsch. And what did Nabokov mean by *poshlust*? I had classmates at Harvard who wrote in such ways, though most often they got published in the *Lampoon*, not sedate Mother *Advocate*.

Pound was unusual in that he never outgrew the youthful kidding, at least in his letters. Those extraordinary letters—I know of nothing like them. Nearly to the end of his life his letters were full of high jinx and teasing. This is at its most brilliant in the correspondence with Eliot, soon to be published I hope. The zany salutations in the letters to Old Possum [Eliot] set the tone:

"Waaal, now, me deer protopheriius . . ."
"To the affbl Protopgerius Wunkus . . ."
"Waaal Possum, my fine old Marse Supial . . ."
"Waaal my able an sable ole Crepuscule . . ."

The letter to Eliot of April 25, 1936, shows the Kollitch Komedian in fine form:

> NO!! my dear Sathanas: On reflection I see that it wd. be whoredom, and not even en grande cocotte.
>
> If the luminous reason of one's criticism iz that one shd. focus attention on what deserves it, a note by E. P. on Bridges wd. be a falsification of values.
>
> I thought (cogitation, the aimless flitter before arriving at meditatio) that the cadaver might be used to feed young pelicans, or to do honour to the obese but meritorious F.*
>
> But more I fink ov it, the less honest does such a wangle appear.
>
> It is not a case where one can merely throw Richardly Aldingtonian dirt. I can't think Britsches has enough influence

* "the obese but meritorious F." is Ford Madox Ford.

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to be worth attacking. I mean one hasn't the excuse, as one has with nine-tenths of your *Criterion* writers, all Murrays, — — — —, bastards, Normans, Angells, etc., the vipers that ought to be killed. The number of putrid pigs in England is so large that to dig up a corpse for reburial, especially a corpse of the null, wd. be inexcusable unless one were absolootly in need of feed within the fortnight.

I did not instantly expect to find the EVIL one lurking under yr. weskit. But so was it.—/—/

It was a special delight for Pound's correspondents when he enclosed a doggerel poem in a letter. This to Eliot in 1937, about Djuna Barnes:

There onct wuzza lady named Djuna
Who wrote rather like a baboon. Her
Blubbery prose had no fingers or toes;
And we wish Whale* had found this out sooner.

And this, about Eliot, in 1934, addressed to me as "Dilectus mihi filius and bro/(ther) in Xt If you can figger out them relashunships":

The Rt/Rev/bidding him corajo.

*Come now old vulchuh, rise up from thy nest*
*Stretch forth thy wing on Chimborazzo's height,*
*Strip off thy BVDs and undervest,*
*Display thy WHANGUS in its antient might!*

*The old scabs is a droppin' orf the world its sore*
*And men wd. smell they cornCOB poipe wanct more.*

Who was "Geofry Stowell"? None of my Poundian friends have ever heard of him. But it's a genteel, almost Jamesian name, which would have gone down well in Wyncote, where Pound's parents were stalwarts of Calvary Presbyterian Church.

Hang it all, Robert Browning, there can be but the one Ezra!

* "Whale," Eliot's colleague F. V. Morley at Faber & Faber.

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*Gary Snyder*

## At the White River Roadhouse in the Yukon

At White River Roadhouse in the Yukon
A bell rings in the late night:
A lone car on the Alaska highway
Hoping to buy gas at the shut roadhouse.

For a traveler sleeping in a little room
The bell ring is a temple in Japan,
In dream I put on robes and sandals
Chant sutras in the chilly Buddha-hall.

Ten thousand miles of White Spruce taiga.
The roadhouse master wakes to the night bell
Enters the dark of ice and stars,
To sell the car some gas.

*April, 1984*

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*Elizabeth Spires*

//

Two verticals lie down,
each to the other, a horizon,
each to the other,
alone and unaligned.
But can we not bend Time
until we touch and cross,
unafraid to overrun
the map that Nature put us on?
My altered angle runs away
from yours until, halfway
around the world, we meet again,
the map's four corners gone,
love's parallels concluding
at the fevered poles where
day for one is never-ending
night for its opposite.
It's there that barefoot angels
dance to music that we cannot
hear, but try to, being human.
We are two lines, pulled
up & down the globe by Time
& Choice & Circumstance
until Eternity marries us,
and two become one.

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*Gerald Stern*

## One Animal's Life

*for Rosalind Pace*

This is how I saved one animal's life,
I raised the lid of the stove and lifted the hook
that delicately held the cheese—I think it was bacon—
so there could be goodness and justice under there.
It was a thirty-inch range with the pilot lit
in the center of two small crosses. It was a Wincroft
with a huge oven and two flat splash pans above it.
The four burners were close together, it was
a piece of white joy, from 1940 I'd judge
from the two curved handles, yet not as simple as
my old Slattery, not as sleek. I owe
a lot to the woman who gave me this house, she is
a lover of everything big and small, she moans
for certain flowers and insects, I hear her snuffle
all night sometimes, I hear her groan. She gave me
a bed and a kitchen, she gave me music, I couldn't be
disloyal to her, and yet I had to lift
the murderous hook. I'll hear her lectures later
on *my* inconsistencies and hypocrisies;
I'll struggle in the meantime, like everyone else, to make
my way between the stove and refrigerator
without sighing or weeping too much. Mice
are small and ferocious. If I killed one it wouldn't be
with poison or traps. I couldn't just use our weapons

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without some compensation. I'd have to be present—
if it was a trap—and hear it crash and lift
the steel myself and look at the small flat nose
or the small crushed head, I'd have to hold the pallet
and drop the body into a bag. I ask
forgiveness of butchers and hunters; I'm starting to talk
to vegetarians now, I'm reading books,
I'm washing my icebox down with soda and lye,
I'm buying chicory, I'm storing beans.
I should have started this thirty years ago,
holding my breath, eating ozone, starving,
sitting there humming, feeling pure and indignant
beside the chewed up bags and the black droppings.

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*C. K. Williams*

# Le Petit Salvié

*for Paul Zweig*
*1935–1984*

1.

> "The summer has gone by both quickly and slowly.
> It's been a kind of eternity, each day spinning
> out its endlessness, and yet with every look
> back, less time is left . . ."

So quickly, and so slowly . . . In the tiny elevator of the flat
you'd borrowed on the Rue de Pondicherry,
you suddenly put your head against my chest, I thought to
show how tired you were, and lost consciousness,
sagging heavily against me, forehead oiled with sweat, eyes
ghastly agape . . . so quickly, so slowly.
Quickly the ambulance arrives, mewling at the curb, the
disinterested orderlies tie you to their stretcher.
Slowly at the clinic, waiting for the doctors, waiting for the
ineffectual treatments to begin.
Slowly through that night, then quickly all the next day, your
last day, though no one yet suspects it.
Quickly those remaining hours, quickly the inconsequential
tasks and doings of any ordinary afternoon.
Quickly, slowly, those final silences and sittings I so regret now
not having taken all of with you.

2.

"I don't think we'll make the dance tonight," I mumble
mawkishly. "It's definitely worse," you whisper.

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Ice-pack hugged to you, you're breathing fast; when you stop answering questions, your eyes close.
You're there, and then you slip away into your meditations, the way, it didn't matter where,
in an airport, a café, you could go away into yourself to work, and so we're strangely comforted.
It was dusk, late, the softening, sweetening, lingering light of the endless Paris evenings.
Your room gave on a garden, a perfect breeze washed across your bed, it wasn't hard to leave you,
we knew we'd see you again: we kissed you, Vikki kissed you, "Goodbye, my friends," you said,
lifting your hand, smiling your old warming smile, then you went into your solitude again.

3.

We didn't know how ill you were . . . we knew how ill but hid it . . . we didn't know how ill you were . . .
Those first days when your fever rose . . . if we'd made you go into the hospital in Brive . . .
Perhaps you could have had another year . . . but the way you'd let death touch your life so little—
sometimes you seemed to hold your own mortality before you like an unfamiliar, complex flower.
Your stoicism had become so much a part of your identity, your virtue, the system of your self-regard.
If we'd insisted now, you might have given in to us, when we didn't, weren't we collaborating
with what wasn't just your wish but your true passion never to be dying, sooner dead than dying?
You did it, too: composed a way from life directly into death, the ignoble scribblings between elided.

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4.

It must be some body-thing, some species-thing, the way it comes to take me from so far,
this grief that tears me so at moments when I least suspect it's there, wringing tears from me
I'm not prepared for, had no idea were even there in me, this most unmanly gush I almost welcome,
these cries so general yet with such power of their own I'm stunned to hear them come from me.
Walking through the street, I cry, talking later to a friend, I try not to but I cry again,
working at my desk I'm taken yet again, although, again, I don't want to be, not now, not again,
though that doesn't mean I'm ready yet to let you go . . . what it does mean I don't think I know,
nor why I'm so ill-prepared for this insistence, this diligence with which consciousness afflicts us.

5.

I imagine you rising to something like heaven: my friend who died last year is there to welcome you.
He would know the place by now, he would guide you past the ledges and the thorns and terror.
Like a child I am, thinking of you rising in the rosy clouds and being up there with him,
being with your guru Baba, too, the three of you, all strong men, all partly wild children,
wandering through my comforting child's heaven, doing what you're supposed to do up there forever.
I tell myself it's silly, all of this, absurd, what we sacrifice in attaining rational mind,
but there you are again, glowing, grinning down at me from somewhere in the heart of being,
ablaze with wonder and a child's relief that this after all is how astonishingly it finishes.

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6.

In my adult mind, I'm reeling, lost— I can't grasp anymore
what I even think of death.
I don't know even what we hope for: ecstasy? bliss? or just re-
lease from being, not to suffer anymore.
At the grave, the boring rabbi said that you were going to eternal
rest: rest? why rest?
Better say we'll be absorbed into the "Thou," better be con-
sumed in light, in Pascal's "Fire!"
Or be taken to the Godhead, to be given meaning now, at last,
the meaning we knew eluded us.
God, though, Godhead, Thou, even fire: all that is gone now,
gone the dark night arguments,
gone the partial answers, the very formulations fail; I grapple
for the questions as *they* fail.
Are we to be redeemed? When? How? After so much disbelief,
will something be beyond us to receive us?

7.

Redemption is in life, "beyond" unnecessary: it is radically de-
meaning to any possible divinity
to demand that life be solved by yet another life: we're com-
pressed into this single span of opportunity
for which our gratitude should categorically be presumed; this
is what eternity for us consists of,
praise projected from the soul, as love first floods outward to
the other then back into the self . . .
Yes, yes, I try to bring you to this, too; yes, what is over now
is over, yes, we offer thanks,
for what you had, for what we all have: this portion of eternity
is no different from eternity,
they both contract, expand, cast up illusion and delusion and
all the comfort that we have is love,
praise, the grace not to ask for other than we have . . . yes and
yes, but this without conviction, too.

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8.

What if after, though, there is something else, will there be judgement, then, will it be retributive,
*and if it is, if there is sin, will you have to suffer some hellish* match with what your wrongs were?
So much good you did, your work, your many kindnesses, the befriendings and easy generosities.
What sort of evil do we dare imagine we'd have to take into those awful rectifications?
We hurt one another, all of us are helpless in that, with so much vulnerable and mortal to defend.
But that vulnerability, those defenses, our belittling jealousies, resentments, thrusts and spites
are the very image of our frailty: shouldn't our forgiveness for them and our absolution be assumed?
Why would our ultimate identities be burdened with absolutes, imperatives, lost discordant hymns?

9.

How ambiguous the triumphs of our time, the releasing of our intellects from myth and dream.
We've gained much, we think, from having torn away corrupted modes of aggrandizement and gigantism,
those infected and infecting errors that held sway over us and so bloated our complacencies
that we felt no compunction in inflicting notions of the metaphysical into the very flesh of others.
How much we've had to pay, though, and how dearly we have had to suffer for our liberating dialectic.
The only field still left to us to situate our anguish and uncertainty is the single heart,
and how it swells, the heart, to bear all with which we used to fill the startled heavens.
Now we have the air, transparent, and the lucid psyche, and gazing inwards, always inwards, to the wound.

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10.

The best evidence I have of you isn't my memory of you, nor your work, although I treasure both,
and not my love for you which has too much of me in it as subject, but the love others bore you,
bear you, especially Vikki, who lived out those last hard years with you, the despairs and fears,
the ambivalences and withdrawals, until that final week of fever that soaked both your pillows.
Such a moving irony that your last days finally should have seared the doubt from both of you.
Sometimes it's hard to tell exactly who I cry for— you, that last night as we left you there,
the way you touched her with such solicitude, or her, the desolation she keeps coming to:
*"I've been facing death, touched death, and now I have a ghost I love and who loves me."*

11.

Genevieve, your precious Gen, doesn't quite know when to cry, or how much she's supposed to cry,
or how to understand those moments when it passes, when she's distracted into games and laughter
by the other kids or by the adults who themselves don't seem to understand this terrible non-game.
At the cemetery, I'm asked to speak to her, to comfort her: never more impossible to move beyond cliché.
We both know we're helplessly embedded in ritual: you wanted her, I tell her, to be happy,
that's all, all her life, all of which she knows, but nods to, as she also knows what I don't say,
the simplest self-revealing truths, your most awful fear, the brutal fact of your mortality:
how horribly it hurt to have to go from her, how rending not to be here as father and friend.

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12.

Nothing better in the world than those days each year with you,
your wife, my wife, the children,
at your old stone house in the Dordogne, looking over valleys
one way, chestnut woods the other,
walks, long talks, picnics, visits to Lascaux and Les Eyzies,
listening to each other read.
Our last night, though, I strolled into the moonless fields, it
might have been a thousand centuries ago,
and something suddenly was with me: just beyond the boundaries of my senses presences were threatening,
something out of childhood, mine or man's; I felt my fear, familiar, unfamiliar, harsh and fierce,
might freeze me to the dark, but I looked back— I wasn't here
alone, your house was there,
the zone of warmth it made was there, you yourself were there,
circled in the waiting light.

13.

I seem to have to make you dead, dead again, to hold you in
my mind so I can clearly have you,
because unless I do, you aren't dead, you're only living somewhere out of sight, I'll find you,
soon enough, no need to hurry, and my mind slips into this
other tense, other grammar of condition,
in which you're welded to banalities of fact and time, the reality
of what is done eluding me.
If you're accessible to me, how can you be dead? You are accessible to me, therefore . . . something else.
So what I end with is the death of death, but not as it would
have been elaborated once,
in urgencies of indignation, resignation, faith: I have you neither here, nor there, but not not-anywhere:
the soul keeps saying that you might be here, or there— the
incessant passions of the possible.

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14.

Here's where we are: out behind the house in canvas chairs,
you're reading new poems to me,
as you have so often, in your apartment, a park in Paris— anywhere: sidewalk, restaurant, museum.
You read musically, intensely, with flourishes, conviction: I might be the audience in a hall,
and you are unimaginably insecure, you so want me to admire every poem, every stanza, every line,
just as I want, need, you, too, to certify, approve, legitimize, and all without reservation,
and which neither of us does, improving everything instead, suggesting and correcting and revising,
as we knew, however difficult it was, we had to, in our barely overcome but overcome competitiveness.
How I'll miss it, that so tellingly accurate envy sublimated into warmth and brothership.

15.

Here's where we are: clearing clumps of shrub and homely brush from the corner of your yard,
sawing down a storm-split plum tree, then hacking at the dozens of malevolently armored maguey:
their roots are frail as flesh and cut as easily, but in the August heat the work is draining.
Now you're resting; you're already weak although neither of us will admit it to the other.
Two weeks later, you'll be dead, three weeks later, three months, a year, I'll be doing this,
writing this, bound into this other labor that you loved so much and that we also shared,
still share, somehow always will share now as we shared that sunny late summer afternoon,
children's voices, light; you, pale, leaning on the wall, me tearing at the vines and nettles.

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16.

"A man's life cannot be silent; living is speaking, dying, too, is speaking," so you wrote,
so we would believe, but still, how understand what the finished life could have meant to say
about the dying and the death that never end, about potential gone, inspiration unaccomplished,
love left to narrow in the fallacies of recall, eroding down to partial gesture, partial act?
And we are lessened with it, amazed at how much our self-worth and joy were bound into the other.
There are no consolations, no illuminations, nothing of that long awaited flowing toward transcendence.
There is, though, compensation, the simple certainty of having touched and having been touched.
The silence and the speaking come together, grief and gladness come together, the disparate voices fuse.

17.

Where are we now? Nowhere, anywhere, the two of us, the four of us, fifty of us at a *fête*.
Islands of relationship, friends and friends, the sweet, normal, stolid matrix of the merely human,
the circles of community that intersect within us, hold us, touch us always with their presence,
even as, today, mourning, grief, themselves becoming memory, still there is that within us which endures,
not in possession of the single soul in solitude, but in the covenants of affection we embody,
the way an empty house embodies elemental presences, and the way, attentive, we can sense them.
Breath held, heart held, body stilled, we attend, and they are there, covenant, elemental presence,
and the voice, in the lightest footfall, the eternal wind, leaf and earth, the constant voice.

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18.

"The immortalities of the moment spin and expand; they seem to have no limits, yet time passes.
These last days here are bizarrely compressed, busy, and yet full of suppressed farewells . . ."
The hilly land you loved, lucerne and willow, the fields of butterfly and wasp and flower.
Farewell the crumbling house, barely held together by your ministrations, the shed, the pond.
Farewell your dumb French farmer's hat, your pads of yellow paper, your joyful, headlong scrawl.
The coolness of the woods, the swallow's swoop and whistle, the confident call of the owl at night.
Scents of dawn, the softening all night fire, char, ash, warm embers in the early morning chill.
The moment holds, you move across the path and go, the light lifts, breaks: goodbye, my friend, farewell.

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*Baron Wormser*

## 1967

It was a summer for sitting naked in
The backyard, the deep drizzle deploying the young
As an aspect of the lately-discovered elemental.
Too cool and damp for lyrical bouts,
Bodies gained gravity and pondered

*The ease of dissolution while dirt, grass,*
And the soft spume of slugs stuck to flesh.
The neighbors were appalled, confused, bothered,
And resigned in the way people are
In assassination times.

You might as well argue with the night,
Though mothers and fathers still stormed,
Invoking Bible and country and the *ne*
*Plus ultra* of bourgeois security.
How hateful is the finickiness of exaggeration,

The wish to merge with the unavoidable!
Good sense goes out the window for a reason.
Those huge white worms adrift on a solid sea
Gathered dew and immediacy
While the government stayed inside

Honing its grudges, complaining in orders.
It could have been a parable with all
The coveted distance of literature but
The moist joy clung like Eden,
The pained, pierced voices fell down like rain.

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*Charles Wright*

## *from* A Journal of the Year of the Ox

Fever and ooze, fever and ooze:
Pronoun by pronoun, verb by irregular verb,
Winter grows great with spring: March:
already something has let loose
Deep in the hidden undersprings
Of the year, looking for some way out: moss sings
At the threshold, tongues wag
down the secret valleys and dark draws
Under the sun-stunned grass:
What can't stop comes on, mewling like blood-rush in the ear,
Balancing over the sunken world:
fever and ooze, fever and ooze.

—9 March 1985

I used to sit on one of the benches along the Adige
In a small park upriver from S. Anastasia
from time to time
When I lived in Verona,
the Roman theatre like lapped wings
On some seabird across the water
Unable to rise, half folded, half turned in the pocked air
The river spray threw up
on me and on it.
Catullus's seat - VALERI - was carved on top of the left-hand wing.
I used to try to imagine—delicious impossibility—
What it must have been like to be him,
his vowels and consonants

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The color of bee wings hived in the bee-colored afternoons.
An iron-spiked and barbed wire jut-out and overhang loomed
Just to my left.
I always sat as close to it as I could.

I remember a woman I saw there once,
in March,
The daylight starting to shake its hair out like torch flames
Across the river,
the season poised like a veiled bride,
White foot in its golden shoe
Beating the ground, full of desire, white foot at the white threshold.
She stared at the conched hillside
as though the season
became her,
As though a threshold were opening
Somewhere inside her, no woman more beautiful than she was,
No song more insistent than the beat of that white foot,
As she stepped over,
full of desire,
Her golden shoe like a sun in the day's deep chamber.
I remember the way she looked as she stood there,
that look on her face

—27 March 1985

Such a hustle of blue skies from the west,
the pre-Columbian clouds
Brooding and looking straight down,
The white plumes of the crab apple tree
Plunging and streaming in their invisible head-gear.

April plugs in the rosebud
and its Tiffany limbs.
This earth is a plenitude, but it all twists into the dark,

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The not no image can cut
Or color replenish.
Not red, not yellow, not blue.

—9 April 1985

Draining the Great Valley of Southwest Virginia
and Upper East Tennessee,
The Holston River cuts through the water gaps and the wind gaps
In the Stone Mountains and Iron Mountains
Northeast-southwest,
a trellis pattern of feeder streams
Like a grid from Saltville in the north
To Morristown and Jefferson City in the south
Overlaying the uplifts and folds
and crystalline highlands
That define and channel the main valley,
Clinch Mountain forming a western wall,
The Great Smokies and the Unakas dominant in the south.

In 1779 it took John Donelson from December till March
To go from Kingsport to Knoxville on it
By flatboat, a distance nowadays of two hours by car.
All of my childhood was spent on rivers,
The Tennessee and Hiwassee, the Little Pigeon,
The Watauga and Holston.
There's something about a river
No ocean can answer to:
Leonardo da Vinci,
in one of his notebooks,
Says that the water you touch is the last of what has passed by
And the first of what's to come.

The Cherokee called it Hogoheegee,
the Holston,
From its source in Virginia down to the mouth of the French
Broad.
Donelson's flotilla to Middle Tennessee
From Fort Patrick Henry

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—one of the singular achievements
In opening the West—
Began from the Long Island of the Holston, across
The river and upwind of the fort.
It took them four months, down the Holston and Tennessee,
Up the Ohio and Cumberland,
to reach Nashville,
The Big Salt Lick, and the log cabins of settlement.
*Intended by God's Permission*, his journal said,
Through Indian ambush, death by drowning, death by fire,
Privation and frostbite,
*their clothes much cut by bullets*,
Over the thirty miles of Muscle Shoals,
Loss of the pox-carrying boat and its twenty-eight people
Which followed behind in quarantine and was cut off,
Intercepted, and all its occupants
butchered or taken prisoner
*Their cries distinctly heard by those boats in the rear*,
Passage beyond the Whirl,
the suckpool by Cumberland
Mountain,
Slaughter of swans, slaughter of buffalo,
*Intended by God's Permission* . . .

Imagine them standing there
in full headdress and harness
Having to give it all up,
another agreement in blackface,
This one the Long Island of the Holston Peace Treaty,
Ending, the first time, the Cherokee Nation.
Imagine them standing very still,
Protecting their families, hoping to hang on to their one life.
Imagine the way they must have felt
agreeing to give away
What wasn't assignable,
The ground that everyone walked on,
all the magic of water,
Wind in the trees, sunlight, all the magic of water.

—16 April 1985

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*Franz Wright*

## To the Hawk

In the unshaded hill
where you kill
every day I have climbed
for a glimpse of you; below me
all the earth turned
golden
in the searing wind,
its abrupt blast
at a bend in the road
where I approach the summit, shining
wind, where you live,
cloaked in your cruel and victorious
nimbus of fire, floating, suspended
someplace out past
visibility:
eyes
kissed by a speech beyond words—
beholding themselves in the sun.

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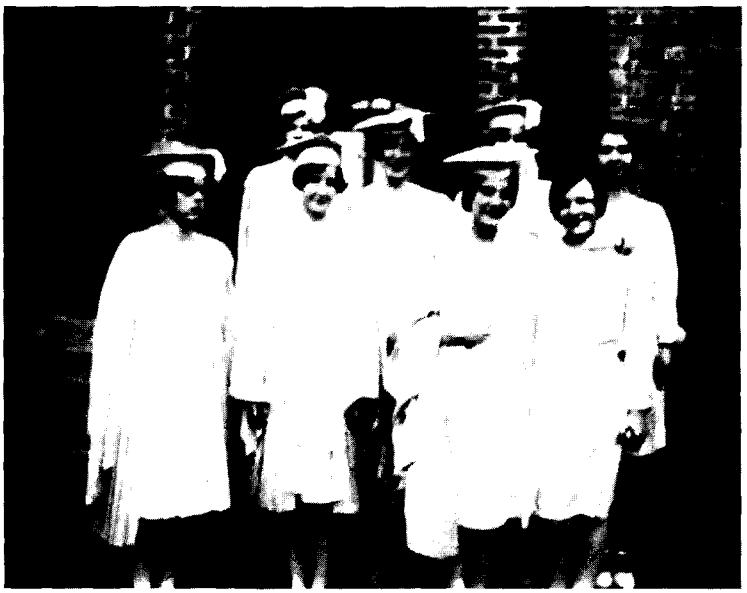

*Annie Wright class of '29. Author is second from right with her arm around a friend.*

# "Role-Modeling"

## Mary McCarthy

Annie Wright, to be truthful, was not an "exclusive" school. That may have been why so many girls left, disappointed, after a year or so. In our class of 1929, for instance, what happened to tall Pauline Paulsen, from Spokane, destined by her height, her bearing, her calm gray eyes and soft rounded cheeks, her prowess with the javelin, her basketball, to be a school leader, almost like the one-and-only Retha Hicks, Class of '25, whom Miss Preston still brought up to us in study hall, wiping her eyes? With Pauline's poise and good looks, she was even able to carry off a Scandinavian surname—otherwise a thing to be

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lived down at the Seminary, witness poor, pale-eyed Gudrun Larsen, whose father owned the Blue Mouse movie theatre in Seattle.

All honors would have been Pauline's had she stayed with us: May Queen, Field Day champion, salutatorian, choir soloist, president of the senior sorority. She was one of three tall beauties from Spokane: herself, Hattie Connor (black hair, high color, blue eyes "put in with a sooty finger," odd, top-drawer accent that I now place as Canadian), and greenish-eyed Betty Reinhardt (only five eight, and not exactly a beauty—skin—but counting as one of them because Nature loves a triad and the three were friends). Attached to them, like a burr, was long-nosed, nosy, dark-eyed Josephine Matthews, who had been in school with them across the mountains in Spokane. When Pauline did not come back for junior year, I felt the deprivation almost like the loss of my parents, although I had never been close to her. None of us had. She was a pillar of the school structure and impersonal, as pillars are meant to be.

The Spokane three kept to themselves; they might have been day pupils, so little did they mingle after school hours with the rest of us boarders. I cannot even remember where their rooms were. Nor did they have anything to do with two other girls from Spokane (besides Dodie Matthews) we had with us: nieces of the poet Vachel Lindsay, one very white and fat, one small and spindly, whose parents were missionaries in China.

I have never been to Spokane, though I used to wake up and peek out at the brilliantly lit station, raising a corner of my lower-berth window shade in the train going east. But I have a magical picture of it, thanks to those three tall Graces: a river running through the center of town and creating two great foaming waterfalls, harnessed to make electricity that glittered all night long; on its bank or nearby, the Davenport Hotel, with a dark paneled lounge, a roaring fire, and leather "davenports" on which tycoons sat with their handsome, well-dressed wives. In addition, the 1911 Britannica supplies a Federal building, the Paulsen building (yes!), the *Spokesman Review* building,

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a Northern Pacific Railway depot, a Great Northern depot, Gonzaga College (R.C.) for boys, Spokane College (Lutheran), surely for boys, too, and Brunot Hall (P.E.) for girls, obviously Annie Wright's east-of-the-mountains shadow in which our tall three would have been star day pupils.

That Pauline did not come back was interpreted by me, I guess, as a "rejection" of the Seminary, and Miss Preston must have seen it so, in more practical terms: it was a blow to the school, her life's creation, to lose a pearl like Pauline at the end of the sophomore year. What a relief it would have been to hear that Mr. Paulsen's fortune had been swallowed up in a bank failure, thus forcing dear stalwart Pauline to go to public high. But no reason—or excuse—was ever given us. Perhaps she went east to a finishing school—the Masters at Dobbs Ferry or the Bennett at Millbrook, both favored by Northwestern parents. We never heard.

It was the same with Ellin Watts, from Portland—five ten, willowy, silver bronze "page boy" bob, but she was in the class ahead, not in our class, and her languid, sleepy-lidded, disdainful (even when occasionally friendly) manner could have warned of a coming defection. And, as though to refill the Oregon quota, there was a new girl that fall, Ruth Williams, from The Dalles, quite tall, with a knot of dark hair, even white teeth, and a brilliant set of widely spaced dark-blue eyes, who was somehow related to the Agens, a Seattle first family that lived in The Highlands, by the Golf Club—her older sister, Florence, taught in the lower school. Ruth Williams was my friend for a few dazzling weeks of my junior year, sailing into my room like a walking *Debrette's*, telling me who was who in Puget Sound society, holding out the wild hope of introducing me to Jimmy Agen, great golfer and rated the catch of Seattle, still more desirable than Léon Auzias de Turenne, captain (we believed) of Harvard's tennis team and Davis Cup alternate. Never had Annie Wright seemed so full of promise. Yet breathless Ruth stayed with us less than a year and even so outstayed her glory. Possibly she was on a scholarship because of her sister and had been warned to settle down and improve her grades. Anyway, after mid-years or some other marking period, she,

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too, disappeared, like a falling star, leaving only the strange place-name, The Dalles, behind her. According to Webster, the word, of French derivation, denotes "rapids above a flat, slab-like rock bottom, in a narrow, troughlike part of a river." There are several dalles in the American West, but the dalles of the Columbia River (I learn from the faithful Britannica, my life's companion, only one year older than I) were famous for their beauty. Yes, Ruth did say that, and I remember picturing her town as a ford paved with smooth flagstones in a brown transparent river, where speckled trout jumped. But shouldn't it have been salmon? Is it too late for me, I wonder, to make a trip to The Dalles and Spokane? Both could be done, by car from Seattle, in two or three days. I cannot make out whether I am destined to see those places, ringed with fading ink on my life's yellowing map, or destined never to see them.

When Pauline did not come back, it was clear that Hat and Betty would soon be following—we had them on borrowed time. I think of my efforts to "hold" Hat for the Seminary—a hint of how it might feel to try to hold a man who was counting the hours till he was free. We had our Irishry in common and also tone-deafness, the latter much more pronounced (I hope) in her case, making it painful for anyone but another tone-deaf person to sit near her in chapel. That horn-voice, octaves below the rest of us, flatted out the hymns like an untuned barrel organ. She was worst on the slow ones—"Fairest Lord Jesus," "Now the Day is Over," "Jesus Calls Us," which were the ones I loved best. It was like a halitosis affecting the ear. But I did not mind sitting next to her, even sharing a hymn book with her, for to my mind there was something aristocratic in that brute oblivious blare.

Looking on a hymnal together morning and evening was a tie of sorts; her daily closeness encouraged me to try, like a courting male bird, to interest her in the daring books I read and the bold ideas I was voicing. But, like a genuine gouty Blimp, she was indifferent to reading. As with C and lower C-flat, she did not "hear" a difference between James Branch Cabell and *Sorrell and Son*. I was mad about acting and reciting, but she could no more impersonate an emotion than carry a tune;

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I suppose she was too incurious to play a part. Nor did atheism hold any charm for her. She was not a Roman Catholic, which gave believers a good foundation for doubting; she was the only Irish person I had ever met to be a born Protestant. Still, to my satisfaction, if not through my efforts—possibly despite them—she lasted till June. In the fall, then, she did go east to one of those schools. Dobbs Ferry, I guess, because two years later I chanced to see her in the Grand Central Station, in a smart tailored suit, with her big feet in smart, mannish shoes, when I was taking the train to Poughkeepsie. I was proud of Vassar and despised all finishing-schools, but it was James Branch Cabell all over again: she was unaware of a change in our relative standings and looked down on me from her superior height with a bluff, forbearing smile. I might as well have been going to visit a relative in Sing Sing—the Ossining stop.

Or could she have been at the Bennett in Millbrook, also served by the Grand Central? The thought is tempting, because of the Bennett Greek play, well known at the time. At Vassar our beginning Greek class under Mrs. Ryberg went over in a rented vehicle to see them do *The Trojan Women* in Gilbert Murray's translation. Terrible: picture a bare-armed, bare-legged chorus in purple pepluses swaying and moaning on the grass in the hot Dutchess County sun. I like to think of Hattie being imperturbable in a peplus. But where she really went, after Annie Wright, I suppose I shall never know. In the alumnae notes for the Class of '29, the only Spokane girl whose doings are ever chronicled is, naturally, Dodie Matthews.

It is no doubt to Annie Wright's credit, to that of all those Episcopal bishops who had a hand in its making, that on the whole we could not keep smart, social girls very long. Probably there was too much emphasis on studying, and the faculty, some of it, was too good. How good they could be as sheer educators I did not fully appreciate till I decided early in my junior year that I wanted to go east to college.

Such an ambition was rare then for a girl from the Northwest (it was commoner among boys, who were divided between Princeton, Harvard, and MIT); normally Stanford, with its quota of one-eighth girls, was the height of Annie Wright aspiration.

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Among us, the majority of girls who aimed at college at all, rather than at a June wedding, had their sights on the "U" of Washington and were already worrying about whether to go Kappa, Theta, or Gamma Phi. I was determined not to let the "U" happen to me, and Stanford, we heard, typed a girl as a grind and homely; if I was doomed to stay in the West, I would almost rather go to Reed, the crazy college in Oregon that did not have marks, so probably no sororities either. . . . But I had let the decision wait too long. I had been taking the wrong courses to prepare for an Eastern college (*Cooking*, good Lord, with pretty little Mrs. Morrill, a Simmons graduate!), and junior year was too late to start. Or would have been if the Seminary had not risen to the challenge.

Miss Justine Browne, our vice principal and the school "brain," had me send in for catalogues from Vassar, Bryn Mawr, and Radcliffe—my three choices. When they came, that hawk-beaked Athena with pale oysterish eyes seated me at her table—the top spot in the dining-room, just below Miss Preston's table for two—and the thick catalogues passed from hand to hand for our wondering study. Miss Browne liked Radcliffe best, mainly because it shared some classes with Harvard. But Radcliffe had an entrance requirement of four years of Latin—the catalogue left no doubt of that—while Bryn Mawr and Vassar, apparently, would accept three. But I was just *starting* Latin that fall with Miss Mackay: junior year plus senior year made two. So unless that requirement could be waived (and Miss Browne said it couldn't), it looked as though I could forget about studying for the College Boards. If Providence did not intervene, in its Providential way, I was sunk.

Providence entered in the form—dark, thin, knobby—of Miss Ethel Mackay (pronounced "McEye"), a Scot in her late thirties, a product of Girton and Edinburgh and the strictest teacher in the school. In an earlier memoir I have called her "Miss Gowrie." Now she decided that I could do three years of Latin in two if I read Caesar with her in private lessons while having Cicero next year in class. If we started at once, then during the coming summer in Seattle, where she would have a furnished room with a screened porch in the University district, we could

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fit in the campaign against the Germans (Book IV) and the famous bridge across the Rhine. Luckily Latin came easy to me thanks to my Catholic background; *agricola*, *agricolae* (first declension), I felt as if I had known it in a previous life. And not only "*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*," but "*Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae*"—the War and brave little Belgium had taught us *that* lesson from the start of Book I.

Yet not even Miss Mackay and my cradle Catholicism could have squeezed a fourth year (Virgil) into me, with the result that I never had the *Aeneid*. So I am unfinished in my Latin like the little prince in my father's fairy story who, when changed into bird form, lacked a wing because his little sister failed to complete one sleeve of his enchanted sweater.

At Vassar that was an oddity that set me apart from Eastern girls, who had all done the *Aeneid* in their fourth year of high school. And that, in turn, may have led to my taking Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics* in college—something that ordinarily only a Latin major (which I was not) would have done. So oddity compounded oddity, as often happens. Indeed, my curious and slightly excessive Latinity at Vassar may have been compensation for the hole in my language credits that Miss Mackay and I had patched over at Annie Wright during our tutorial "hours." In Vassar's Latin department, headed by stately white-haired Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, author of *Horace and His Art of Enjoyment*, not only did I, an English major, take the *Bucolics* and *Georgics*, Horace's *Odes* and *Epodes*, Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*, the course titled "Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid," the course titled "Juvenal, Martial, and Pliny," but also a half-year course in advanced Caesar (*De Bello Civili*), a half-year one-hour course in a late Latin figure called Aulus Gellius, another in Roman comedy, and full half-year courses in Medieval and Renaissance Latin. Some of this (not Aulus Gellius, who was taught by a handsome young widower) was explained by the fact that my field was English Renaissance, with its strong classical tinge; some of it (Catullus and Juvenal) answered to real passions, and some consisted of what are now called ploys. But ploys are seldom idle. The basis must have been the deficiencies, as I felt them, of a Northwestern education, which I sought

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to correct by additives, as riboflavin is mixed into "enriched" bread. Somewhere in the course of it, I missed Tacitus, which always shocked Edmund Wilson.

Of course the Seminary (like Garfield High School, probably) offered four years of Latin; some of my friends were taking Virgil, though they never used him afterwards, as at Vassar I really could have—my prosody was always weak. One of those bishops, who came west in 1900—the school had been founded by another bishop in 1884, when Washington was still a territory—wanted the Seminary "to be the Wellesley, the Smith, the Vassar of the West." But though Annie Wright, being only a prep school, could scarcely achieve that, it *was* equipped to prepare any girl who wanted it for admission to those colleges. When I took the College Boards, in a university classroom in Seattle, I had had plenty of French (taught by native French speakers), I had had one year of "hard" science—physics—three years of math, stopping short of calculus; if I had desired German, there was old Madam Haynes, the Austrian the girls made pie-beds for, to teach it. In English, after the two Vassar-trained Miss Atkinsons, we had Miss Clare Hayward, who gave us English literature from *Beowulf* through John Galsworthy's *Justice*, not scanting Cowper, the Rossettis, "The Forsaken Merman," and William Morris' "Two red roses across the moon," capped by its parody by C. S. Calverley—"Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese." Under the two Miss Atkinsons, we had had Sir Roger de Coverley, Burke, the *Essays of Elia*, Huxley's "A Piece of Chalk," *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, "Lycidas," *Silas Marner*—the standard offerings guaranteed to turn the standard young person against English literature for up to twenty years.

In fact Miss Hayward did not come to us until we were seniors, at the same time as Miss Marthe Simpson, who was young and half French and taught Art and made amusing floppy puppets. But junior year we had Mrs. Hiatt with her eyeglasses on a chain, a wit and the widow of a clergyman; we had tall handsome Miss Harriet Ingersoll, head of the lower school with dark reddish hair braided in pinwheels at her ears or on other days worn in a coronet; we had had Miss Dorothy Atkinson with *her* eye-

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glasses on a ribbon and her fondness for Mencken, and throughout there were timid little Miss Helen McKay, and shy, stiff Miss Mackay herself.

On the whole our teachers were greatly superior to our girls, and that was a large part of Miss Preston's dilemma. A Dorothy Atkinson was wasted on a De Vere Utter or a Voynne Setzer or on a chronic case of boredom such as Ellin Watts. The girls could not use what the star teachers had to give. Besides, the star teachers, like Miss Mackay, were almost all hard markers and likely also, when it could not be avoided, to report infractions of the rules. Our school could not maintain an elite status socially while offering anything like a serious education. In the East no doubt it could have; you could point to St. Tim's, Walnut Hill, and, at that time, Madeira, as well as day schools like Chapin and Brearley in New York. But the real problem facing Miss Preston was the Northwest itself. Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Alaska constituted the reservoir she had to draw from, with occasional girls appearing from Hawaii and British Columbia. And though it happened that girls went east to be "finished," not only at the Masters and Bennett but even at places like the House of the Pines, the opposite was unthinkable. To induce an Eastern girl to come west, the Seminary would have had to turn into a ranch, with cowboys.

Moreover, in our own state of Washington, girls were more likely to come to us not so much from Seattle (which had its own day school, St. Nicholas, for the upper crust) as from places with names like Cle Elum and Hoquiam and Chehalis. In Montana it would be Kalispell (Clover Rath) and White Sulphur Springs (the Ford girls), not Butte, which I think had a kind of real society that had evolved from its primitive days as a wild copper-mining town. This human material that came to us for processing was unclassifiable socially; it was, so to speak, too fresh, like meat that has not been hung.

In Seattle (and in Spokane and Tacoma) stratification had developed, a layering considerably aided by the society column of Colonel Blethen's *Seattle Times*, which told who lunched with whom at the Olympic Hotel on Mondays—the day when it counted to be seen there—and this was a service not only

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to those who had a table every Monday (including an old Sacred Heart girl like Mary Fordyce Blake) but to many who would never have one, such as my friend "Ted" Rosenberg and her sister Till. It was best, evidently, to *be* somebody, with one's name in the paper every Tuesday, but next best was to know who *were* the somebodies. It may seem strange that Jewish intellectuals were interested in the society column (Ted and Till read *Vogue*, too, I guess, besides *Vanity Fair*), but that may have been a healthy sign: *nihil humanum mihi alienum puto.* Eventually I, too, would be "seen lunching" at the Olympic Hotel, though more often than not "with Mrs. Harold Preston and Mrs. M. A. Gottstein," in other words my grandmother and Aunt Rosie.

It may be that the first families of Seattle, so clearly identifiable to themselves, feared to expose their daughters to the contagion of rooming with the daughters of the first families of Wenatchee and Walla Walla—site of the penitentiary—and Chehalis. Why, a parent from there could be *anybody* with the price of the tuition, a Federal judge or state senator but equally well a druggist or feedstore owner. The miscellaneousness of the school's boarders (typified by fanciful or just plain misspelled first names such as "Hermoine," "Rocena," "De Vere," "Voynne," "Betye") had been there from the start, it seems. An account (1884) by the first Bishop of Spokane, whose wife was the first principal, describes a girl who came from Alaska by wagon train, camping out at night and taking almost a month on the way, girls who came from the Hawaiian Islands, girls who went to bed in their clothes, girls who had never been taught to say their prayers. "But most of the girls were nice and well-behaved."

With the day girls it was different. For Tacoma, Annie Wright equaled Seattle's St. Nicholas socially and gave a good education besides; it was the school to go to. Accordingly, our day girls were more glamorous than our boarders. Inevitably there were a few freaks among them, but mostly they were pretty and came from old families—the two Henrys, Elizabeth and Edith, "Baby" Griggs—or had a rich, important father—"El" Perkins', for instance, a rough diamond who owned the Tacoma

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newspaper—or were striking and exotic, like Wilhelmina and Marie-Louise Quevli, who looked like South Sea Island beauties but whose father was a doctor and Danish. There were poetry-reading Elizabeth Hosmer, who was going to Stanford to study premed, and brainy, horsey Dorothy Walker, whose father was an army doctor at Fort Lewis. It was lucky we had the day girls to raise the social tone, even the darling little Catholic LaGasas in the lower school, whose stout mother wearing a vast mink coat took me to eleven o'clock mass on Sunday—their father was a doctor, too.

That the Tacoma girls appeared to have more interesting parents than most of the others may have been related to the fact that Tacoma, the fief of the Weyerhaeuser timber family, was not only a lumber town but a port. Liners left for Japan and China and the Philippines and even for Liverpool and Glasgow, via the Suez Canal. The Seminary, which looked down on an arm of Puget Sound, was close to the railroad tracks (occasionally on our walks we saw hoboes) and to a paper mill smelling of rotten eggs ($H_2SO_4$, little Miss McKay said) when the wind was wrong. In comparison with Seattle, Tacoma was in decline, and this helped to give it an aristocratic air, as though it were the older city. Fort Lewis probably contributed, too, to the Old World feeling of Tacoma, and the fort, which still had some cavalry, no doubt explained the good riding horses and delightful trails a short distance from the city. Our girls signed up for riding lessons (an extra) at Captain Proby's riding academy, but rough Captain Proby fell out of Miss Preston's favor, and instead we went on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings to the stables of Major Mathews, a gentler English officer who had settled with his short-haired wife in our Northwest. They gave us tea and let us smoke when no chaperon accompanied us. Unlike Captain Proby, Major Mathews did not force us to ride in the ring. He let us explore the woodlands, passing by the shores of a little lake, where violets grew in the spring and where along the bank we sometimes saw iridescent water snakes that scared the horses. Once he dismounted and cut me a branch of flowering dogwood and once he used his hat to hold violets.

He taught us to post—we used an English saddle—and how

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to keep our mounts to a trot. Breaking from a trot into a canter was against the rules of horsemanship and showed that you were not in control of your animal. The right way was to go from a walk to a canter. You should take care not to let the horse have his head; sensing your inexperience, he could bolt. Sometimes a canter would turn into a gallop, but a riding horse was not supposed to gallop—that was for cowboys on the plains. If a girl's horse ran away with her, she was to throw the reins over his neck, but Major Mathews could be counted on to head him off if necessary.

One of the horses I rode—a bay—was a single-footer; according to Major Mathews, quite a few of our Northwestern horses were. It was a different gait, more like a rocking-horse. Another, a dappled gray named Bluebell, was a retired race horse, who neither trotted nor cantered but ran. If I recall right, Major Mathews said that was characteristic of a race horse—a long flying stride. I was never a very sure rider, although I loved it with passion, and he was careful of what horses he gave me. The Ford girls, coming from Montana, could be trusted on anything. But one of my horses had a mouth so tender that you could ride him on the snaffle, not using the curb at all.

The Mathewses themselves were mild English people fond of tea and reading. My hours of purest, most intense happiness at the Seminary were concentrated in Saturday-morning spring rides through the woods with another girl and Major Mathews: white-flowering dogwood, violets in thick carpets—purple and white—dark low-branching pines snatching at one's hair ("Hyd Absalon thy gilte tresse clere"), and water snakes, blue, glossy green, and velvet black straight out of "The Ancient Mariner" slithering along the swampy edge of the little lake while the neighing horses reared. I cannot explain why no one was afraid. On the way back to school in the automobile (depending on the chaperon), Major or Mrs. Mathews would let us stop at a take-out place on the highway and have hot barbecue rolls.

There were a number of English influences playing on the Seminary, modifying the social climate, just as the Japanese current brought us mild winters. Not just Miss Hayward and the Mathewses and Miss Mackay. Of the two gardeners, who also tended the furnaces, one was a Yorkshireman, and the other,

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even more strangely spoken, was a Lancashireman. I do not know whether this was policy on Miss Preston's part, to promote a classy image of the Seminary or whether it merely corresponded to a demographic fact: in 1900, I see in the Britannica, the foreign-born population of Tacoma (11,032 out of a total of 37,714) included 1534 English-Canadians and 1323 English. The proximity of Vancouver and Victoria, in British Columbia, added a note of Englishness, too, audible in the speech of Puget Sound people, who have been spared the furry California accent (a contamination from the Middle West; my grandmother and great-aunts, born in San Francisco, were too old to have caught it). Our school library took *Punch* and the *London Illustrated News*. Our reading lists for English had no American classics that I remember—no *Moby Dick* or *Scarlet Letter*—though maybe American literature would not have been found on any private secondary-school list then.

Certainly, on my own, I had started reading American poetry: T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound ("The Ballad of the Goodly Fere"), Edna Millay, Conrad Aiken, E. A. Robinson, even Louis Untermeyer ("Jig to be Danced on the Grave of an Enemy"). But in class, until senior year, it was *Idylls of the King* all the way. All this was a far cry from the true American taste evinced in my grandfather's library. Of course it contained Dickens and Dumas and the Russians and Bulwer Lytton, but for my grandfather, apart from these classics, good reading consisted of *Tom Sawyer*, a set of Frank Stockton, Bret Harte (a great favorite), and maybe Booth Tarkington. I doubt that he ever read Galsworthy or Bennett or Wells. To him, Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927) was my grandmother's library book.

The "Englishness" of Annie Wright was like a whiff of well-used Yardley's lavender. You would not have found anything like it, I think, in the Eastern schools of that time. Yet surely there was no intention on Miss Preston's part to make snobs of us; she was strong on tradition, which she believed was vital to the morale of a school, and possibly to her mind a Yorkshire gardener and *Punch* were part of the school's ivied personality, something for the girls to remember, like the Sunday-night sings in The Great Hall and macaroni-and-cheese (good) for Friday lunch and Wednesdays in Lent.

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But the faculty, insofar as it was superior, was surely a wasteful luxury, however badly paid. The average Annie Wright parent was in no position to appreciate a Miss Ethel Mackay with her whistling false teeth. My grandfather, being a lawyer, and my friend Jean Eagleson's father, an orthopedic surgeon, were exceptional—you had to have some education to practice those professions. But the average father, even when he had gone to the "U" and graduated (thanks to Spanish and business courses), belonged to the great mass of illiterates that knows how to read and write. That was why girls who got bored, like the heavy-lidded Ellin Watts, found a sympathetic ear at home.

Money and culture rarely mix. That was not a peculiarity of the recently settled Pacific Northwest. There is a universal law requiring (truly!) that 99% of the rich be retarded culturally. By and large, Seattle, as I remember it, was not a more uncultivated city than Waterbury, Connecticut (brass), but there was less *old* money in Seattle than in a comparable town back east. Old money is fully as moronic as new money but it has inherited an appearance of cultivation. It buys and subscribes to magazines, which it does not read, supports symphony orchestras and art museums, sends its children to good schools, where they will make poor grades. That is all there is to it. As in Tocqueville's time, the brains of our country are located in the professional class—doctors, lawyers, teachers. Today that class has grown much bigger, but the increase in numbers has only made its members less distinct from the surrounding business society. In any case, poor Miss Preston. Even with the Episcopal Church behind her, she could not make education a marketable commodity in the state of Washington.

Our class shrank, like a wasting body, as it made its way through the classrooms up to graduation. One by one or in droves they left us: the tall trio from Spokane, Vachel Lindsay's fat older niece, Ruth Williams of The Dalles, Hazel Trethewey, Schelda Mae Libby, Imogene Brubaker, Bernice Galt. . . . Roughly the best and the worst. And we gained only a roommate for me senior year—red-cheeked Marie Althen of Tacoma, adopted daughter of German-speaking Alsatian parents.

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As our class ranks thinned after sophomore year and the glamorous seniors of the Class of '27 graduated, I adapted myself to the thin rewards of reality. I became a success in the school while remaining darkly aware of how little that meant. Hopeless as an athlete (except for swimming and riding, which were neither of them team sports), I won fame as an actress. It turned out that I had a talent for being scary that was greatly relished by the lower school: my deep contralto recitation, with gestures, of "The Fall of the House of Usher" had the little ones shrieking and cowering in their seats in the gymnasium; a week or so later, as an encore, I gave them "The Cask of Amontillado." Soon I was being cast as the star of any play our crazed elocution teacher (let go the next year) decided to put on. I remember best *The Son-Daughter*, an ancient David Belasco hit in which I played the motherless daughter of a "rejecting" Chinese mandarin (Dr. Dong Tong, acted by our impassive Hattie Connor) who had wanted a son. Togged out in a red watered-silk blouse with frogs (rented from a costume house) and black, Chinese-style trousers, I had an old amah for my confidante, and I can still hear my ecstatic final lines as I stood stage center on my dainty maimed feet: "Toy Yah! Toy Yah! He have call me his *son*-daughter!" Without wanting to be too sure of it, I guessed that the play was bad, whereas I knew, without having to be told by a teacher, without even thinking about it, that a Goldoni we did later was good. How? Was it because it was slightly boring in comparison?

Junior year I threw myself into school politics. The big event was the election of a May Queen, in theory the most beautiful senior. In practice, beauty was not really the issue or not always. The whole school voted, except the primary grades and the teachers, and often it became a popularity contest, complicated by crushes and by feuding. It had not been a good idea of Miss Preston's to divide the school into Blues and Greens, as in ancient Byzantium, for purposes of basketball rooting; in our junior year, the factions spilled over into the May Queen voting. The middle grades, it had been discovered, i.e., the sixth, seventh, and eighth, were the "swing vote," so after lunch the girls from the upper school went to the lower classrooms to

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canvass for one candidate or the other—as in real politics the choice had been narrowed to two.

That year (1928) in the outside world, adults were divided between Hoover and Al Smith—feelings were hot on both sides. My grandfather became very angry with my Uncle Harold, who would be casting his first vote: "You mean to tell me that in *a national election* you plan to take the word of a sixteen-year-old girl against mine?" As a political veteran, leader of the liberal Republicans in the state senate, he was outraged all that summer that Harold was lending an ear to my anti-Hoover arguments. In our school May Queen tumult, naturally I had been a leading agitator. Indeed, without me, there would have been no tumult: Katie Urquhart, from Chehalis, would have had a vast majority. Her opponent, Margaret Carpenter, was my creature.

In beauty, they were evenly matched: neither had much claim. Maggie, who came from Cle Elum, had thick white, slightly pitted skin, dark-red hair and a placid look. Katie was a thin, strange-looking girl with big flaring nostrils like those of a hungry animal on the scent of prey. We had been friends; it was I who had pushed her for May Queen, drawing converts to what was basically an unlikely cause. I had loved the "qu" in her name, which spoke to me of Highland blood, and I had looked up the Urquhart plaid (squares of dark green and pale green crossed by a bright red line) in the school library and may even have found Thomas Urquhart, translator of Rabelais. Her mother had been a Gamma Phi at the University with my mother and remembered beautiful, sweet Tess Preston. Then something happened, I have no idea what. But I turned on that girl with a vengeance and never forgave whatever it was she said or did. It was my idea to put up Maggie Carpenter against her, and every day as the campaign heated up I was in the middle-school classrooms, haranguing the sixth and seventh grades (the eighth was already won over) on how repellent Katie Urquhart really was—that sallow skin, those yellow eyes, those avid nose-holes, almost scary. I was boldly drawing on the capital of my Poe recitations. And our side won! I had discovered in myself a gift for politics and electioneering and tasted the thrill of power.

The benefits were a friendship with Margaret Carpenter that

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lasted intermittently through her years at Whitman, in Walla Walla, and mine at Vassar; but also, more immediately, a "man" for junior prom that spring: Donnie Fisher, Margaret's cousin, Tacoma's answer to Jimmy Agen in Seattle. Every Seminary girl *knew about Donnie Fisher. With him as my partner, my dance* program was full, and Margaret had told him to send me gardenias for my flame-red chiffon dress with tiers of picoted ruffles. Above, on the balcony, sophomores and freshmen and the Middle School were allowed, before bedtime, to watch the dancers in the Great Hall below.

If it had not been for those May Queen politics, I would have been among them. There was nobody I could ask. Mark Sullivan had got married, and because of my grandparents' absurd attitude I never met any other boys. I would have been ashamed to ask my Uncle Harold. No, if it had not been for this miracle constituted by Donnie Fisher, I could see myself on the balcony looking over the oak railing with the eighth grade. I would have been almost like that poor Naomi Elmendorf last year, whose "man" never came and who sat her senior prom out in a matronly green silk dress with three-quarters sleeves waiting for at least a message, which never came either. A teacher sat with her on the balcony, holding her big hand. Why couldn't she have been allowed to wait in her room? Anyway, this year *I* was spared. I could have fallen in love with Margaret's charming cousin if common sense had not told me that he would remain uninterested, however alluring I tried to be. Since I did not get my hopes up, it did not hurt too much when I never saw him again.

Junior year, I suppose, marked the furthest point in my absorption by the Seminary. I was not exactly happy; after Ruth Williams left, I had no real friends. But I had learned how to exercise power over my circumstances, which was like mastering the over-arm carry in lifesaving. I could hardly have been accused of having "school spirit," yet a note from that time kept for all these years by our class Maid of Honor to the victorious May Queen shows me cheering fiercely for the juniors in a basketball game against the seniors, in which Hattie Connor, no less, had refereed, along with the addressee of my note:

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> I don't want you to think that I meant anything of what I said about you—didn't. But just the same Molstad had 7 [fouls] and Stimpson 3 personal and 1 tech. What does Hattie Connor know about basketball to suit her for the job of keeping score? My God, on Field Day the juniors are going to have something to say about the referees. No crushes! There were four Molstad crushes keeping score or time. Oh, I'm mad.

Better than basketball I remember our Saturday shopping trips, with a chaperon, to downtown Tacoma. We had our own bank accounts, to teach us to handle money, which we mostly spent on Christmas Night perfume and Guerlain bath powder. Then we would have tea at the Old Tacoma Hotel, which had old black waiters, like a Pullman dining car, and wonderful thin sandwiches. Or we would go to the Puss 'N Boots (or was it the Pig 'N Whistle?) for "sweetheart" sundaes. We saw John Barrymore and Dolores Costello and the first talking movie—Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, which I hated.

But the best was when the Stratford-on-Avon players came to Tacoma, and Miss Preston let us go; she may even have let us go on two different nights. Despite the name, they were not a Shakespearean troupe; they were specialists in Shavian comedy and they were not English but Canadian. And Tacoma—not Seattle!—was the town they chose to visit. This was my first real theatre, nothing to do with the Henry Duffy stock company in Seattle, who were specialists in *The Cat and the Canary* and *The Bat*. I remember the philosophical old hotel waiter, played by Baliol Holloway, in *You Never Can Tell*, and a dazzled overall impression of perfect finish. We had had the brilliant idea of inviting Miss Preston herself to be our chaperon; she wore a low-necked dress, and the evening was a riot of pleasure. Though I had never seen highly skilled actors perform before, I had a sense of recognition—the same as with Latin—as though I had met the theatre in a previous incarnation. Miss Preston's next venture into the theatre arts was a projection she arranged in the gymnasium of a silent Swedish film based on *Jerusalem* by Selma Lagerlof—first woman to win the Nobel Prize, in 1909. The subtitles were in Swedish and the action seemed to take

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place in the Holy Land, inhabited, peculiarly, by gaunt, mad-looking Swedish farmers—was it a story of an emigration or was it some modern religious parable? Nobody could guess.

With the departure of Miss Dorothy Atkinson at the end of sophomore year, I lost my audience for the stories about prostitutes and housewives with "eyes like dirty dishwater" that she had encouraged me (once) to send to H. L. Mencken (returned without comment). Now I wanted to be an actress, rather than a writer, while my grandfather thought I had the makings of a lawyer. At the same time my screen idols changed: Pola Negri and Barbara Lamarr gave way to straight-browed Eleanor Boardman; Ricardo Cortez was replaced by Ronald Colman. And when in English class we read *The Idylls of the King* with Miss Atkinson's sister, Miss Marjorie Atkinson, I encountered in literature and immediately recognized my fatal type of man. King Arthur's nephew, Sir Gawain. Not the mighty giant-fighter of *Syr Gawayne and the Grene Knighte* (a fourteenth-century alliterative poem unknown to me even by name), but a Tennysonian figure, debonair and disabused.

He won my heart once and for all during his visit to the countrified castle of Astolat seeking an unknown knight—in reality Sir Lancelot—who had won a tourney at Camelot and then disappeared, covered with wounds. Unaware of his identity, the Lily Maid and her father are nursing him. Gawain is quite taken with the Lily Maid—"well, if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"—till he shrewdly senses the lie of the land: she loves the wounded knight. So he entrusts her with the diamond he is carrying to confer on the winner of the tourney and dryly tells her good-bye.

> For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
> And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
> From your own hand; and whether
> he love or not,
> A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well. . . .

Being Sir Gawain, he cannot forgo a final trenchant hint: "Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two / May meet at court here-

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after. . . ." Having guessed that it is Lancelot, he is wondering of course what Queen Guinevere will say. Saying nothing further himself, he "Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went / A true-love ballad, lightly rode away." Cool and dry was Sir Gawain. The faithful Sir Bedivere pronounced a fitting elegy on him when he was slain in the great battle of the West against his brother Modred, the horridest name in literature: "Light was Gawain in life and light in death was Gawain."

It strikes me now, nearly sixty years too late, that Sir Gawain, whose name was seldom paired with a lady's, was the perfect type of homosexual. But the thought could not have crossed my mind then. I liked everything about Sir Gawain, even the pronunciation of his name (not "Gawáyne," but "Gow-wain," the first syllable accented and rhyming with "cow"); he reminded me of Ronald Colman and vice versa. To prefer Gawain, an accessory lord, to the great and somber Lancelot ("His honour rooted in dishonour stood,/ And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true") may seem like preferring Horatio to Hamlet. Yet it was not a ploy. Far from seeking to be different through my foible, I kept trying to get others to share my craze for him, just as I had tried to get my grandmother to like Ricardo Cortez, while she remained true to Adolphe Menjou. I always sought to proselytize.

What I thrilled to in Sir Gawain must have been his sophistication. In that he resembled "the wise youth Adrian" of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, another who enchanted me with his disabused ways—it has taken me most of a lifetime to perceive that Meredith intended him, obviously, as a caricature. Later, more nobly, there came Berowne and, best of all, Mercutio (" 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve"—*dies*). I ask myself now whether these blasé young men (leaving out Mercutio) were not second-raters. Could I have fallen in love, in real life, with Sir Gawain in a red two-seater? Certainly he could have been my seducer with no trouble whatever. I wonder about love, though. Does one fall in love with an appalling second-rater? A lot of literature suggests that one does, but I do not believe it. I agree with Plato that one loves the good.

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# Gertrude Stein: Letters to a Friend

## edited by Philip Galanes

*The letters which follow were written by Gertrude Stein to an obscure, struggling writer named Wendell Wilcox. He had seen Stein's work in 1926 while he was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago. He read a borrowed copy of her book* Tender Buttons. *Fifteen years later he wrote to her:*

> I can recognize writing almost the minute I see it but certainly in two minutes and that is a gift from God very like that of the Greek girl who used to do the prophecies and whom no one believed. . . . And about you I knew in my first year of college when I first saw *Tender Buttons* and had never then heard your name. . . . But I knew then and still remember pearl pearl goats and a lot more.

*After graduating from college in 1929, Wilcox remained in Chicago, hoping to become a writer. He followed Stein's career closely and attended her lecture "Poetry and Grammar," which she delivered at the University of Chicago in November, 1934; the following spring, he attended the four additional lectures she read when she returned to the university. His repu-*

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*tation as a student of Stein and modernism prompted Thornton Wilder, then professor of dramatic literature and classics at the University of Chicago, to invite Wilcox to participate, with thirty selected students, in a series of ten conferences with Stein.*

*When Stein left Chicago, Wilcox's interest in her writing did not dampen. For her part, Stein was sorry to leave America, which she considered the center of modernist writing. Having gotten on well together in Chicago, Stein and Wilcox began to correspond shortly after Stein returned to Paris in 1935. Wilcox was anxious to receive further instruction from Stein, who, in turn, wanted to be kept current in the dynamic of American culture. She was very admiring of his letters: "My dear Wendell, Your letters are the best letters of all the many letters that I have as letters, Gtrde."*

*As will be seen, Stein went to great lengths to locate a publisher for Wilcox, although it was not until the final years of her life that Wilcox began to enjoy some commercial success with his fiction. His stories began to appear in* The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, *and* Collier's, *as well as in the smaller, regional journals which had been publishing his fiction since the early thirties. He was awarded an O. Henry Prize in 1944 for "The Pleasures of Travel," which first appeared in* The New Yorker, *and his work was often included in Edward J. O'Brien's* Best American Short Stories *series. Finally, in 1945, to Stein's delight, Wilcox's novel* Everything is Quite All Right *was accepted by Bernard Ackerman Company.*

*After Stein's death, Wilcox published very little, although he continued to write, supporting his work with an assortment of jobs. His wife Esther was a librarian. Finally, Wilcox settled in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he worked as an archivist at the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina. He died in 1981.*

*The Stein-Wilcox correspondence is collected in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Philip Galanes, the compiler and arranger of this exchange, was referred to the letters during his freshman year at the University of North Carolina. He was in the course of researching a paper on modernism.*

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*None of the Stein letters, all of which are hand-written, were dated, but Wilcox kept Stein's original envelopes: the post-marked dates have been set in the upper-right hand corner of the letters.*

Paris Postmark: December 1935

My dear Wilcox

Don't you worry I like to be your sharpener and it's a pleasure, and I liked your last story ["Autumn"] in Ms.[1] and I am sure I will like your novel when I see it. I am writing to Harcourt[2] of Harcourt and Brace and telling him about it, and so if you want to write to him too yourself I will already have done so. We do miss you all awfully, Paris is pleasant this year, after thinking about revolutions they are at present very tranquil and life has settled back to be just the old life which is after all not such a bad life after all it is all the life we have so we might as well have it, go on and eventually it will happen, I am sending you a book and lots of Christmas wishes, always

Gtrde. Stein

Are you married.

[1] *Manuscript*, a literary magazine published in Athens, Ohio, from 1934–36.
[2] Alfred Harcourt, founder of Harcourt, Brace and Company in 1919; Stein's first major publisher, who published *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933).

Paris Postmark: 26 March 1936

My dear Wendell

Gertrude Abercrombie[3] just wrote me that Harcourt had written to you to send the second novel,[4] I hope good things follow from that, Harcourt always says he does not like first novels he prefers them second third and even preferably fourth, and there is something to be said for his point of view, because in some mysterious way the first one is not as good as it seems

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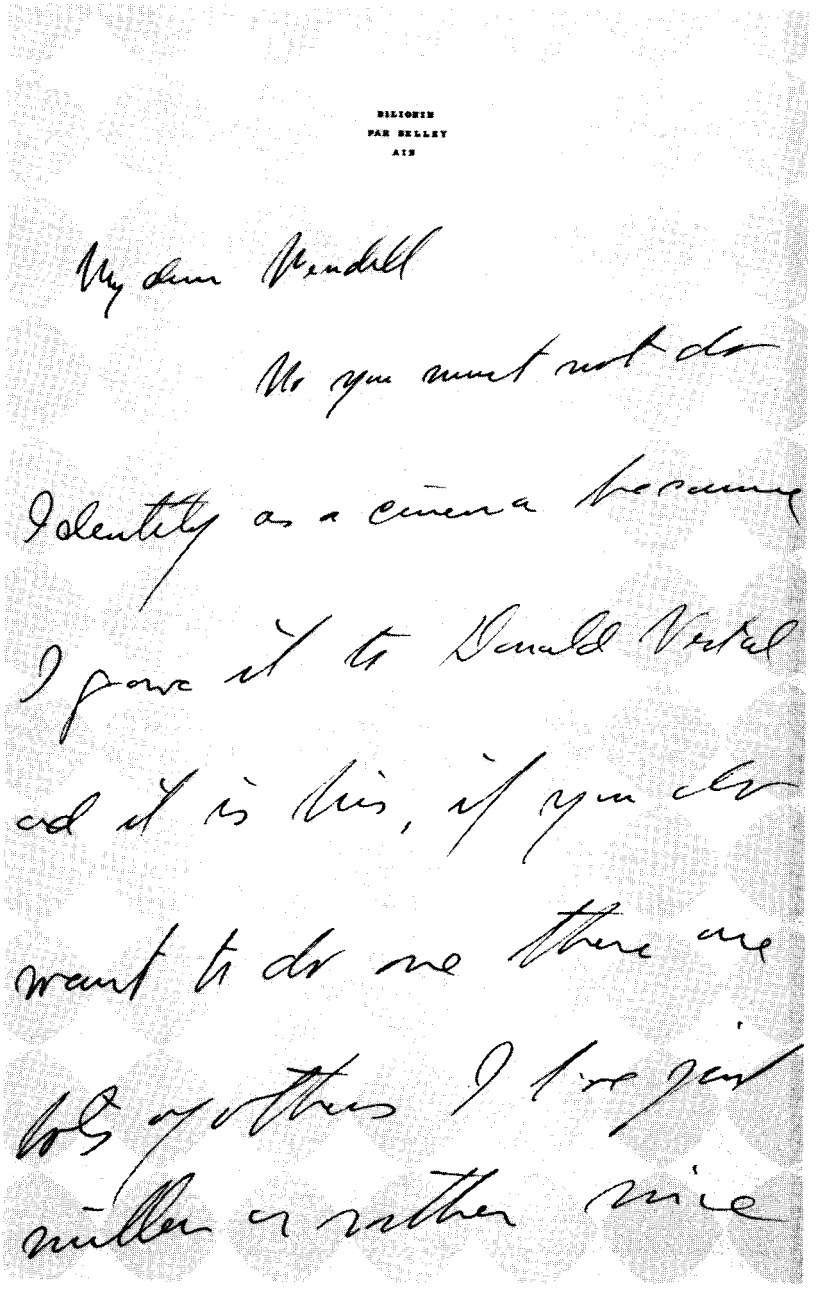
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My dear Wendell

No you must not do
Identity as a cinema becaus
I gave it to Donald Vrtal
ad it is his, if you do
want to do me there are
lots of others I love just
miller or rather mine

*The first page of Stein's letter to Wendell Wilcox dated August 3rd, 1936.*

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unless you come to be dead which sometimes happens which after all is in a kind way a second and a third. Well anyway let me know good or bad but I do hope it is good, and with you it will not stop, it may look like it and feel like it and even act like it, but it will not stop. I've been kind of that way myself and for quite a long while and now lectures are over,[5] and I am just bursting, have just done one long play I like,[6] am working on another which is pretty good and a book,[7] it is like the small boy who wrote to us, spring has come and nothing can stop it now, I liked all the news Gertrude Abercrombie sent of herself, if there ever is a photo of you reading the bible tell her to send it but I will be writing to her one of these days I am much taken with her address Stoney Island Avenue, There are three fellows in New York, Maurice Grosser, Paul Bowles, and Henry Dunham[8] who are putting on a movie of a play in Geography and Plays,[9] they are some of the old Paris crowd if it gets done I'll let you know, we did have a good time in England, and Cambridge and Oxford were good but I like Chicago best much the best, I hope something will happen that will take us back to America without lecturing, just meeting without lecturing, not that I did not like it because I did, enormously, well lets hope that its the theater and that would be fun, well anyway the house is full of wild flowers, the painters are all painting when they don't make poetry and the writers are all radioing, but spring has come always

Gtrde.

[3] Gertrude Abercrombie, Chicago surrealist painter.

[4] Wilcox's unpublished novel *Color of Darkness* (1934).

[5] Stein lectured extensively at American and British universities and secondary schools in 1934–35.

[6] Either *Listen to me. A play* or *Not and now*, which Stein completed in 1936.

[7] Stein began working on *Everybody's Autobiography* in 1936.

[8] Maurice Grosser, the painter; Paul Bowles, the American writer and composer; and Henry Dunham, a filmmaker who studied at Princeton University, and who corresponded frequently with Stein.

[9] Grosser, Dunham and Bowles were working on a screen-adaptation of two of Stein's plays.

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Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 29 June 1936

My dear Wendell

Bennett Cerf[10] of the Random House has just been with us and I talked to him about you. He says send him 20 E. 57 Street the novel of yours that you like best and write him a note with it telling him that you are the man I told him about. If at first we don't succeed try try again. Had a letter from Hilde Abel[11] she is in Paris but we are not, these things will happen, there really isn't anything to say about communists, who is it that complained of them that they want to make everybody happy, well anyway they don't or they do but it is not what amuses us lots of love

Gtrde Stein.

[10] Bennett Cerf was Stein's principal publisher beginning in 1934.

[11] American short story writer; joined the Communist Party in the early thirties, somewhat to Wilcox's chagrin. Never having met Abel, Wilcox had written Stein for news about her.

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 3 August 1936

My dear Wendell

No you must not do Identity[12] as a cinema because I gave it to Donald Vestal[13] and it is his, if you do want to do one there are lots of others I have just written a rather nice one with real characters called "Not and now" but anyway it will be over by then. It is not hot here it is raining, it is not a period of writing that comes to a close but a period of living, I kind of have an idea about that and I just wrote a little something about it, and I am doing a big book perhaps about it, because after all everybody is being now thrown back upon the earth which is all covered over with people and how interesting that can be until somehow there is something to see.

Well anyway lots of good luck to you, and the best of good luck in knitting, Miss Toklas says tapestry is even more soothing, I like cutting hedges and cleaning paths better or doing nothing,

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but it is harder to do nothing because Spain is upsetting, I liked Spain so much, lots of love

Gtrde Stein.

[12] Stein's play *Identity* (1935), unpublished.
[13] American author and puppeteer.

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 29 August 1936

My dear Wendell

Yes we liked your article in Ms.[14] very much, and the young man, I read his story,[15] his technique is good but so far he has not much to fill it, in fact his technique is quite xcellent, perhaps in the long book[16] there is more inside, it is unfortunate that they are cognizant of the fact that they are xperimenting since they are not, they are really writing all they know, to xperiment means to pose a problem and to pose a problem destroys your sense of present, I am sending you when it comes out Relation of human nature to the human mind,[17] I meditate a lot about that, what is genius and why are there so few of them, there always are just as few of them so why worry. Did you tell Bennett Cerf there was another one, I am glad you like *Saints and Singing*,[18] do anything you like or not, . . . . I am getting awfully interested about America, it seems to me to be getting more nineteenth century English all the time, the rest of the world is getting 20th century American, and America is getting 19th century English, their minds and their ways are like that, well anyway, the Spaniards are still revolting, I like their being Carlists, I used to love to read about the Carlists in Spain when I was little, it is pleasant that you can't really get lost, you may be lonesome but you can't get lost and good luck to you always

Gtrde Stein.

[14] Wilcox's article in *Manuscript*, "American Writing and Erisman."
[15] Robert Erisman's story "Stained Glass Medallions."
[16] Probably never published, at least no record.
[17] Stein's book *The Geographical History of America.*
[18] A play by Stein.

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Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 10 October 1936

My dear Wendell,

I am sorry about Bennett Cerf[19] I have just written to him and told him that you were not certain about sending him your second one but that I would rather tell you to as I was quite certain that sometime you would be doing one that he would want and I would like it to be for him, so do whatever you think best but certainly you do write well, I always like your letters a lot. The trouble is well the trouble is that it is all that is America has just lost being American and has become greatly like the English of the Maybuter[?] school the Oxford movement and the pre-Raphaelites, even you cannot quite resist that kind of Englishness and yet I kind of think that you might do rather a wonderful satire of it, why do you not find some form of writing that would make it possible for you to do a satire of your contemporaries, I am immensely taken with your description of the Proletarian play and the surrealist, do do it, go on do it, the book I am asking Bennett to send you is the new one about America,[20] the thing in J.L.IV[21] is just one of a series of short things I have been writing about anecdotes of Bilignin, we are still staying on, at least till the 1 of November, it is peaceful here and seems likely to go on being so, you never can tell, they had a big meeting here of the fascists, nobody knew they were coming and 10000 of them came and 1500 cars and we in Bilignin never knew anything about it until three days after it happened that is the way revolutions can be, well anyway have a good time and write about what they do in some form you like, . . . . and lots of love

Gtrde Stein.

[19] Cerf had rejected Wilcox's first novel; Wilcox was deliberating over sending him his second.

[20] Stein's *The Geographical History of America.*

[21] James Laughlin's anthology of experimental writing *New Directions in Prose and Poetry.*

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Paris Postmark: 12 December 1936

My dear Wendell

Yes go to it, By the dawns early light,[22] I do not mean satire about people I mean satire that creates the xistence that is there, and you do it all the time in your letters, there is nothing particularly promising about the light at dawn if it is early enough, the sun takes so long to rise afterwards that the promise is all used up, but all the same if the sun is warm and your light is the sunlight. Go on.

There I got interrupted which was yesterday and now I am of the same opinion, I do not know what you can do but I do think you can do something and will, to be sure I never have seen either of your long novels, I have only seen two very short stories which were good but there are pieces of your letters that seem to me even more, and I do think By the Dawns Early Light will do it, you do get the xistence of the people in your letters by getting rid of the people and I can see that that is what you will do, you will do what you will do, and I will like what you will do so do it. Merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and lots of them. If any of these long stories ever really have a vacation from being refused I would like to see them but anyway write,

Always
Gtrde Stein.

[22] Following Stein's advice to write satire, Wilcox had just written of the title for a proposed satiric piece: "By The Dawn's Early Light." "It is a title," wrote Wilcox from Chicago, "that practically writes itself."

Paris Postmark: 1 April 1937

My dear Wendell,

I am hoping Aswell[23] has said yes by this time, the thirtieth year is a good year for good hope and Alice [Toklas] says how did you get your courage up, she admires you she says for many years longer she has been frightened of yeast,[24] she can do everything else, she is fearless with any recipe even the most profes-

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sional but yeast not yeast, how she says did you get your courage up if you tell her perhaps she can, and she says she will send you the best french recipe with yeast that she has ever seen and she says she admires you, . . . . I am working very much, and Pepe[25] has had rheumatism, my play[26] with Lord Berners[27] music and decor goes on in London the 27 of April and we are to be there and I am hoping for Harpers yes for you

Always
Gtrde.

[23] Edward Aswell, American publisher; at Harper and Brothers. Aswell was considering Wilcox's second novel on Stein's recommendation.
[24] An allusion to Wilcox's statement in a previous letter: "I have been learning to bake with yeast. I have always been afraid of yeast."
[25] Stein's and Toklas's pet chihuahua.
[26] *A Wedding Bouquet.*
[27] Lord Gerald Berners (1883–1950); British composer, painter, and author, who wrote the music for his collaboration with Stein on *A Wedding Bouquet.*

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 28 July 1937

My dear Wendell

I have not been working much, I finished *Everybody's Autobiography*[28] in June and then I thought I would once more and yet again think about the novel and write one to be called *Ida, a novel* and then there it is, are they there enough to write a novel that is those that are not there, I wonder I wonder all the time, a play yes because once you have done the play it is up to the others to make it xist but a novel you have got to do the whole of it, including where it is and I am discouraged about detective novels, I don't want to begin with a crime nor end with one, I got to write a novel, its easy to do a short story, because like a play in a short story somebody else can make it xist but a novel oh dear a novel, well I have not got any idea but I guess I will begin again, it is hot almost like America, no rain, . . . . well anyway lots of love

Gtrde.

[28] Stein's second account of her and Alice's life.

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Paris Postmark: 11 January 1938

My dear Wendell

Happy New Year, and it would be nice if it were a happy new year, I have just been trying again, I have written to Lindley Hubbell[29] who has at last received a real and apparently most useful contract with Knopf after a very long well call it anything you like but it was long and in a funny kind of a way he looks like you, anyway when I saw you in Chicago I thought I was seeing him and I told him how well you wrote and suggested he should write to you and perhaps well perhaps if he did something might happen he is more than kind he is helpful, he is in New England and I think it could be worthwhile, otherwise we are in a state we are moving, the landlord wanted to put his son in our house and we wept on each others shoulders that is the landlord and I did but they were rather crocodile tears, because having so completely written it down I was ready to leave and of course he wanted me to and we are very happy at the change xcept and of course that the process is frightful and poor *Ida*[30] completely drowned out, not that there are not moments of meditation, and sometimes I think I have got it, but no writing, I did a french book on Picasso[31] and now we move but when we are all there I will write you again and tell you more about Ida, I kind of think there will be an Ida and there is an Elsie[32] and god bless you always

Gtrde.

[29] Lindley Hubbell, an American poet whose book, *Winter Burning*, was published by Knopf in 1938.
[30] Stein's novel-in-progress.
[31] Stein's *Picasso* was first published in French (Paris: Floury, 1938).
[32] Main character in Wilcox's *Everything Is Quite All Right.*

Paris Postmark: 8 December 1938

My dear Wendell,

I have found someone who has some influence with the Guggenheims[33] and who is interested in Catullus, he is at the head of the work of uncovering the mosaics at Saint Sophia in Con-

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stantinople and he is particularly interested in Catullus[34] because Catullus loved Myeia spellt something like that in Anatolia and he wants to know if you are particularly interested in that, I said you were interested in everything and certainly that. Now he wants your full academic history where you have studied and what, and what your knowledge is of Catullus and with that he thinks he can help, also your geographical feeling about Catullus, now send this to me by return mail because I have to have it to him in N.Y. the first week of January, and there must be no delay, it is a good hope lots of love

Gtrde.

[33] In 1938, Wilcox applied for a Guggenheim fellowship.
[34] Wilcox was working on a novel about Catullus at the time.

Paris Postmark: 22 December 1938

My dear Wendell

Have you had my letter telling you to tell all about yourself and Catullus, particularly in respect Turkey Anatolia, to Thomas Whittemore[35] and if you have not done it yet do it at once because he is our best chance to get you the Guggenheim, he has influence with them which is necessary and so please do it at once and very well,[36] it is snowing and feeling almost like America, but we have weathering on the windows and all the mist comes through but then this will probably be all the cold we will have. Merry Christmas to all of you all and all of you

Always
Gtrde.

[35] American archaeologist and author.
[36] Though Whittemore wrote Wilcox a recommendation for the Guggenheim, "One of the strongest people sent me to read and I was really very moved by it," Wilcox did not receive a fellowship.

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: July 1939

My dear Wendell,

I did not ask you but just went ahead on my own, and there is a hope and I am sending it. After I read your ms.[37] I got to

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thinking that England might, it did first for me and it might for you and so without asking you because I did not want to disappoint, I sent it to my London agent[38] who is the only agent I have ever known who produced results, and here is the first reply, and as he always does as much as he says I have good hopes, I am giving him your address and he will write to you direct, and if I can get it done golly I will be pleased I will write you all about what I felt and everything bientôt, this must go off now

Always
Gtrde.

[37] Wilcox's novel, *Everything Is Quite All Right.*
[38] Probably William Aspenwall Bradley.

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 11 November 1939

Oh Wendell Wendell

When I get a letter from you I drop large round black tears of the very best ink because you have the most interesting style in those letters that has come out of America for many a day and oh dear. Well Listen. You see what I mean is this, about 1900 America suddenly discovered Life with a capital L and Sex with a capital S and man with a capital M and it does not suit no it does not, Whitman started it but then he really did not find the words that made it, that came after with Dreiser and the others who well who forgot the genius of America. I can't say I did not feel that way a bit in *Three Lives*[39] but fundamentally not, and that is the trouble to me, you too as all that generation are still under the kind of thing the Hapgoods[40] stood for, all these things and really and truly what is your genius is the good America of Emerson Hawthorne Howells etc, and you do do sometimes things with it in your letters and then you remember life and sex not as it is lived but as it is seen and oh dear your style is another, well of course you just will go on doing as you please, what else can you do, but now that Sammy has broken the ice,[41] by the way we have been under snow already but now it is all autumn, I just wanted to say that it was so and now I want to tell you how delighted I am that

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Thornton [Wilder] suggested you for me and I am awfully looking forward to it,[42] if they do or if they do not you will send it to me will you not, I liked what you said about my Faust[43] when you wrote it is almost the best of anything anybody ever said, and so do do send me it, don't wait, and tell Sammy we have not forgotten him, he got kind of funny with war but then poor darling he has not the habit, and sometime soon I will write again and this is just to tell you to send it.

love
Grtde.

[39] Stein's collection of three long stories, *Three Lives*.
[40] Hutchins Hapgood (1869–1964); American novelist and social critic who tried to help Stein publish *Three Lives*.
[41] Reference to the criticism on Wilcox's novel which Stein sent via Sam Steward a mutual friend after Steward visited Stein in France.
[42] Wilcox's article "Notes on Stein and Abstraction" for *Poetry*.
[43] Stein's play *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*. In a previous letter, Wilcox had written that the play's "little words take on a poetic and oracular quality that is very satisfying."

Bilignin par Belley, Ain December 1939

My dearest Wendell,

Thanks so much for doing the article[44] and you know I do think I really do that your words are the most xciting that they make over there, and I can't help it but I do think that you would be one of the great essayists I just do, but I know if you won't, however you never can tell, I never thought I would write what they asked me to write, and now I find myself doing it, a child's book[45] for one, a portrait of Picasso[46] for another and now a description of the french in the 20 century[47] for a third, so sometime it will happen somebody will ask you to write essays and lo and behold you will write them and they will be the most interesting essays that have been written in America for long long years, and I am glad I am the first one, really glad, I am sending you the English edition of *The World is Round*, *Paris France* is coming out in March, golly its cold not as cold as Chicago nor Finland but plenty cold enough, I am so pleased

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and I like your letters write whenever you feel like it it is always a pleasure a real pleasure best to you

Gtrde.

[44] Wilcox's article "Notes on Stein and Abstraction."
[45] *The World is Round.*
[46] Stein's extended essay *Picasso.*
[47] Stein's *Paris France.*

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 27 August 1940

My dear Wendell

You are awfully near going to be president of the United States, I never did think that anybody else [Wendell Wilkie] could have a name like yours, it is rather astonishing, and thanks for all the good wishes, naturally we do not have word, because only air mail letters come, there are practically no others,[48] I am so glad about O'Brien[49] but how about the Bible[50] I was awfully interested in that one, you know all this time we live in predictions, the relation of war and predictions is most interesting, in the last thing which I have just sent to America which is the description of the last three months of our war,[51] I go largely into the subject of predictions, and some day when we meet we will tell each other all about it, they are true that is the funny part and there is a wonderful book called *The Last Year of War* by one Leonardo Blake, which I believe in absolutely and which I burnt the day of the armistice, but in which I still believe, he is a shark on dates, his dates are an xact science, alright, well anyway, if you write about Romans, don't forget predictions, there are the wonderful predictions of the curé d'Ars[?], well anyway predictions are it, so why not mix up the bible and Catullus and make predictions the theme of it all, predictions once there is a war and particularly this war are and is everything, well the sun is shining and we are waiting, and tell Sammy[52] to write, we would like to hear,

lots of love
Gtrde.

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[48] Reference to the good news that Stein's *Paris France* had been warmly received by American critics.
[49] Wilcox's inclusion in Edward O'Brien's *The Best American Short Stories of 1940*.
[50] Wilcox had projected a novel treating the Bible and the history of Christianity.
[51] An article Stein wrote describing the effect of war in France, "The Winner Loses," in the *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1940.
[52] Sam Steward.

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 10 December 1940

My dear Wendell,

Happy New Year to you and even if this does not come on New Year's Day all the same Happy New Year to you, I have had a new prediction, Saint Odile[53] and she says wonderful things, it says that in the war, the guerrier aile[?] *s'élever jusqu'au dans le firmament pour y saisir les étoiles afin de les projeter sur les villes et y allumer de grandes incendiés,*[54] she also says that the germans armies *seront décimée par un grand mal étrange*[55] and that later *Tous les peuples spolies récouveront ce qu'ils ont perdu et quelque chose de plus.*[56] It is all very fine and sounds passionately true, I am going on with my novel called *Mrs. Reynolds*,[57] you know the one called *Ida* is coming out in the beginning of the year, naturally I am not as interested in *Ida* as I am in *Mrs. Reynolds*, I have done about 30 pages of her and she feels alright just now, but is it a novel, I pass the time here reading all the end of 19 and early 20 century English sentimental novels, I wish I could write one like that just full of forlorn hopes and truth and purity and death and sadness and nobility, and emotion, but instead I write *Ida* and *Mrs. Reynolds*, oh dear. . . . Life seems difficult but really it is fairly easy and here we are. I am wondering more and more you all say we are coming in soon, but coming in where, well anywhere China or Albania or the ocean or the sky anybody getting as far as here will be most welcome, but anyway happy New Year, more of them all of them Happy New Year.

Always
Gtrde.

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[53] French saint; born blind and cast out by her family, Odile was adopted by a convent where she miraculously regained her eyesight.
[54] The soldier gets up as far as the sky in order to seize the stars, finally to throw them on the cities and to ignite large fires there.
[55] Will be destroyed by a great strange evil.
[56] All the despoiled people will recover what they have lost and then some.
[57] Stein's novel, published posthumously, *Mrs. Reynolds and Five Earlier Novelettes.*

Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 2 January 1942

My dear Wendell,

*Cranford*[58] came, just sweetly came along and without any trouble, and it came for New Years eve just like a book should come, beautifully timed to arrive for a fête and we did so much like the dedication, I suppose even everybody in Chicago, is kind of upset, by the news[59] as it is, we were pretty much so the first days and then we resigned ourselves to patience and tranquility, as we have done all these recent years, I go on gently with Mrs. Reynolds, she converses gently with Mr. Reynolds and I have not the slightest idea what the book is like, but it does go on. You will be pleased that *Paris France* with the Atlantic article to finish it has and is having a very considerable success here in its translation, I even signed twenty copies in Belley just as if it had been Chicago, they all like it, the farmers the farmers wives and the farm hands the shopkeepers and the intellectuals, I always did want to write a book that anybody could read, I had hoped to have done it with *Everybody's autobiography* but I seem at last to have done it in french in *Paris France*, bless you Wendell and happy New Year, and lots of it

Always
Gtrde.

[58] Wilcox sent Stein a copy of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Cranford.*
[59] France had capitulated to the Germans on June 22, 1940.

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*Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and an unidentified friend at a carnival shooting gallery in France, in 1934.*

*Wendell Wilcox at his home in North Carolina. A photograph taken of him in the thirties appears in the background.*

*Gertrude Stein standing on the runway of the Chicago International Airport in 1934.*

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Bilignin par Belley, Ain Postmark: 27 March 1942

My dear Wendell,

What is the news, is Sammy bleeding for his country's good or is he just just, there in Chicago, you are of course there and doing what, you will be pleased that "To Do"[60] is being printed by Smith and Durrell, and there is a nice story about you and a nice story about Sammy, we had a very long and very dreary winter but now spring has come with its offensives, peaceful and otherwise, and here we are

lots of love
Gtrde.

[60] Stein's book of alphabet play, "To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays," was published posthumously in the volume *Alphabets and Birthdays*.

Paris Postmark: 7 May 1945

My dear Wendell

Here is a little remembrance[61] from over here, Don Roscher [62] I saw but not in combat but in the hospital, he seems a nice boy but it is so difficult to see him again which I would like to, because there is everything just now xcept a way to move around, xcept feet, they are always there but his hospital is too far away, but I did get there once, perhaps we will meet again. I am glad that you sound so cheerful and I imagine you are quite as cheerful as you sound which is pleasant, we are up over our heads in the American army, like it, yes I do, I like it a lot a complete and entire lot, lots of love yes lots,

Gtrde.

[61] Stein's card to Wilcox was written on the back of a Galerie Roquepine catalogue for the painter Riba-Rovira, and inside the catalogue the gallery had published a note about the painter, written by Stein.
[62] High school teacher in Chicago; mutual friend of Wilcox and Stein.

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Cable Paris 21 November 1945

WAITED FOR ELSIE[63] DELIGHTED WITH ELSIE HAPPY FOR ELSIE CHARMED WITH ELSIE

LOVE FROM GERTRUDE STEIN

[63] Main character in Wilcox's novel *Everything is Quite All Right*, finally accepted and published by Bernard Ackerman in 1945.

Paris Postmark: 14 November 1945

My dearest Wendell,

Everything is quite alright, and this time to me it is really done, you know I used to complain that you did not own your novel emotion as you owned your essay emotion, by essays I mean letters, but this time you have and you were right to insist that it was novels and not essays because when you really own your novel it is a realer ownership than owning essays, and this time the novel is completely owned, even to its tiniest detail, I am very enthusiastic, and it is a pleasure. I never saw the story "England is in Flames,"[64] do send it to me if you have a copy xtra, I would like to have it, we are very busy as we are off on our travels, I have finished the Willie and Brewsie book,[65] it is short no more than 60–70 pages, but I am very pleased with it, it will be out in the spring, I wonder how you will like it, we are off to Nancy, to speak to G.I.'s then to Biarritz and more G.I.'s and my play they are going to give, "Yes is for a very young man,"[66] and then to Brussels in Belgium, and that will be fun, we stayed in Paris all summer so now it is winter, we want to wander, yes its a nice title Everything is quite alright, and thats the way it is, quite really is, bless you Wendell, lots of love

Gtrde.

[64] Wilcox's story "England in Flames," published in *Harper's Bazaar*.

[65] Stein's novel *Brewsie and Willie*.

[66] Stein's play *Yes is for a very young man* was originally scheduled for production by an army acting troupe at the University of Biarritz, but Stein later cancelled the production, having disapproved of the director's interpretation of the play.

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

## FICTION

**Nadine Gordimer** is the author of eight novels, including *July's People*, *Burger's Daughter*, and *The Conservationist*, which won England's Booker Prize in 1974. Her most recent collection of short stories, *Something Out There*, was published by Viking in 1984.

**William Maxwell** has published six novels, *The Folded Leaf* being his best known, two volumes of stories, and a quasi-historical family memoir. He was a fiction editor at *The New Yorker* for forty years.

**Leonard Michaels** is the author of *The Men's Club*. He lives in California and teaches at the University of California at Berkeley.

**Alice Munro** lives in Clinton, Ontario, Canada. She is the author of one novel—*Lives of Girls and Women*—and several books of short stories, including *The Progress of Love*, published in September, 1986 by Knopf.

**Marilynne Robinson** is the author of *Housekeeping* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981). She was born and grew up in Northern Idaho. She lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

## POETRY

**John Ash** has published two volumes of poetry, *The Goodbyes* (Carcanet 1982) and *The Branching Stairs* (Carcanet 1985). He was born in England, and currently resides in New York. He received an Ingram Merrill fellowship for 1985.

**Robert Bringhurst** has published nine books of poetry, including *Bergschrumd*, *Tzuhalem's Mountain*, and *The Beauty and the Weapons*. He reads and translates several ancient and modern languages, among them Greek, Latin, and Arabic. He lives on Bowen Island in Vancouver, Canada.

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**Harold Brodkey** is at work on his long-awaited novel, *The Party of Animals.* His work has appeared in *The New Yorker, The Paris Review, Partisan Review,* and *American Poetry Review.* His story collection, *First Love and Other Sorrows,* was recently reissued by Vintage.

**Raymond Carver**'s new book of poems, *Ultramarine,* will be published this October by Random House; his previous collection, *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water,* was recently reissued in a Vintage paperback edition. His collections of stories include *Cathedral, Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.*

**Amy Clampitt** is the author of *The Kingfisher, What the Light Was Like,* and a forthcoming collection, *Archaic Figure.* She will be at Amherst College in 1986–87 as a Visiting Writer.

**Alfred Corn** has been awarded the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Special Award for his most recent book of poetry, *Notes from a Child of Paradise* (Viking, 1984). His other collections are *All Roads at Once* (1976), *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (1978) and *The Various Light* (1980).

**Douglas Crase** is the author of *The Revisionist* (Little, Brown). He received a Whiting Writer's Award for poetry in 1985.

**James Dickey** is the author of numerous books of poetry, as well as the novel *Deliverance.* His new novel, *Alnilam,* will appear in the spring.

**Tom Disch**'s latest work is *Amnesia,* a computer-interactive novel on two double-sided discs that has been brought out by Electronic Arts.

**Carlos Drummond de Andrade,** who was born in 1902, is generally considered the greatest poet of modern Brazil. His selected poems, *Travelling in the Family,* edited by **Thomas Colchie,** will be published in November, 1986, by Random House.

**Jonathan Galassi**'s translations have appeared in *Otherwise: Last and First Poems of Eugenio Montale* (Random House). He also edited and translated Montale's selected essays, *The Second Life of Art* (Ecco Press), published in 1982. His edition of John Cornford's *Collected Writings* has recently been issued in paperback by Carcanet Press. He is an editor at Farrar, Straus & Giroux and poetry editor of *The Paris Review.*

**Jim Gauer** lives in Los Angeles and works as a consultant in technology for the Belgian government.

**Allen Ginsberg**'s latest collection of poetry, *White Shroud,* will be published by Harper & Row in September, along with *The Annotated Howl.* His *Collected Poems 1947–82,* was published by Harper & Row last year.

**Jorie Graham** is currently teaching at the University of Iowa. A new collection of her work, *The End of Beauty,* will be published by Ecco Press in 1987.

**Linda Gregg**'s second book of poems, *Alma,* was published by Random House this year. She was a recipient of a 1986 Whiting award.

**Barbara Guest** recently published a biography of H.D., *Herself Defined: H.D. The Poet and Her World,* (Doubleday, 1984). She also has published a novel, *Seeking Air* (Black Sparrow). Her poetry includes *Moscow Mansions* (Viking), and *The Countess from Minneapolis* (Burning Deck).

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**Anthony Hecht**'s most recent book is *Obbligati: Essays in Criticism*, which was published by Atheneum in 1986. He currently teaches at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

**John Hollander** was recently elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His *Powers of Thirteen* was published by Atheneum in 1983. His forthcoming book of poetry is *In Time and Place*. He teaches at Yale University.

**Richard Howard** is a poet, critic and translator. His ninth volume of poems, *No Traveller*, will be published by Atheneum next year.

**Lawrence Joseph** has completed his second book of poems, *Curriculum Vitae*. He is a law professor at Hofstra University and lives in New York.

**James Laughlin**'s new books of poetry are *Selected Poems* (City Lights) and *The House of Light* (Grenfell Press). He is the publisher of New Directions. A two-part interview with Laughlin, entitled "The Art of Publishing I," appeared in issues 89 and 90 of *The Paris Review*. His essay on Ezra Pound, "Walking Around A Water-Butt," also appears in this issue.

**David Lehman**'s new book of poems, *An Alternative to Speech*, will be published by Princeton University Press in the fall. He has edited an anthology of poems and commentary, *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms*, forthcoming from Macmillan.

**William Logan**'s second book, *Difficulty*, was published earlier this year. He has recently returned from a year in England.

**Christopher Logue**'s books of poetry include *Wand and Quadrant* and *New Numbers*. He has also edited two books of comic verse: *The Children's Book of Comic Verse* and *Sweet and Sour, An Anthology of Comic Verse*. He lives in London, England.

**James Merrill** is the author of many books of poems, the most recent of which is *Late Settings*, published by Atheneum last year.

**Czeslaw Milosz** is the author of numerous collections of poetry, the most recent of which include *Bells in Winter*, *The Separate Notebooks* and *Unattainable Earth*; and many books of prose, including *The Land of Ulro* and *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. In 1980, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. He teaches Slavic Studies at the University of California in Berkeley.

**Robert Hass** has published *Praise*, a book of poems, and *Twentieth Century Pleasures*, a collection of essays, for which he won the 1984 National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism. He recently translated Czeslaw Milosz's *Unattainable Earth* in collaboration with the poet.

**Howard Nemerov** has published numerous books of poetry, as well as novels, stories, and essays. His most recent are *Inside the Onion*, a volume of poetry, and *New & Selected Essays*. Two new books, *The Oak in the Acorn* and *XII Lectures on Proust*, will be published in 1987.

**Sharon Olds** currently teaches at Brandeis University and at the Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island. Her third book of poems, *The Gold Cell*, will be published by Knopf in January, 1987.

**Ron Padgett** is the translator of Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Poet Assassinated and Other Stories* (North Point) and the editor of Edwin Denby's *Com-*

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*plete Poems* (Random House). SUN is reissuing an extensively revised edition of his *Great Balls of Fire.* He is a recent recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship.

**Molly Peacock** recently won an Ingram Merrill Award. She is the author of two books of poems, *And Live Apart*, published by University of Missouri Press in 1980, and *Raw Heaven*, published by Random House in 1984.

**Robert Pinsky**'s most recent book, *History of My Heart*, was awarded the William Carlos Williams Prize by the Poetry Society of America.

**Katha Pollitt** is the author of *Antarctic Traveller* (Knopf), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry in 1983. She lives in New York City.

**Jim Powell** is a graduate student in Classics at the University of California at Berkeley.

**Liam Rector**'s *The Sorrow of Architecture* was published by Dragon Gate. He was a 1985–86 Guggenheim Fellow and is currently working on his second book of poems, *Baltimore.*

**Mark Rudman**'s book of poems, *By Contraries and Other Poems*, will be published by the National Poetry Foundation this fall. He is also the author of *Robert Lowell: An Introduction to the Poetry* and the translator of Pasternak's *My Sister—Life*, for which he received the Max Hayward Award. He is the editor of *Pequod* magazine.

**Sherod Santos**'s first book of poems, *Accidental Weather*, was published by Doubleday as part of The National Poetry Series.

**James Schuyler**'s fifth book of poems, *A Few Days*, was published in 1986 by Random House. His previous book, *The Morning of the Poem*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

**Frederick Seidel**'s book *Sunrise* won the Academy of American Poets' Lamont Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. His most recent book *Men and Woman: New & Selected Poems* was published by Chatto & Windus in England.

**Hugh Seidman**'s books include *Collecting Evidence*, *Blood Lord*, and *Throne/Falcon/Eye.* He lives in New York and teaches at the New School.

**Karl Shapiro** is the author of numerous books of poetry and criticism, and a novel. He received the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 for his second volume of verse, *V-Letter and Other Poems*, and the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1969 for his *Selected Poems.* In issue 99, a section of "At Auden's Grave" was inadvertently omitted; *The Paris Review* regrets the error and is pleased to reprint the corrected text of the poem.

**Charles Simic**'s *Selected Poems 1963–1983* was published in 1985. His twelfth book of poems, *Unending Blues*, will be published in the fall of 1986.

**Gary Snyder** spent the summer of 1986 in Alaska teaching a field course on the lore of Grizzly Bears.

**Elizabeth Spires'** second book, *Swan's Island*, was published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1985. She is spending the 1986–87 academic year in London on an Amy Lowell Travelling Poetry Scholarship.

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**Gerald Stern** will publish a new collection, *Lovesick*, in the Spring of 1987 with Harper & Row.
**C. K. Williams'** books of poetry include *I Am the Better Name* (Houghton Mifflin, 1972), *With Ignorance* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977) and *TAR* (Random House, 1983).
**Baron Wormser**'s second book of poems, *Good Trembling*, will be published by Houghton Mifflin in 1986. He lives with his family in Mercer, Maine.
**Charles Wright**'s latest books are *The Other Side of the River* and *Orphic Songs*, translations from the Italian of Dino Campana, both published in 1984. "A Journal of the Year of the Ox" is from a work in progress entitled *Zone Journals*. He lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.
**Franz Wright** was a 1985 NEA grant recipient, and has recently published a book titled *Going North in Winter* (Gray House Press).

## FEATURES

**Philip Galanes**'s work has appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*. His edited and annotated manuscript of the Stein-Wilcox correspondence won the Paine and the Field Prizes at Yale University.
**Mary McCarthy** is the author of twenty-one volumes of essays, social analysis, cultural commentary and fiction. The first volume of her autobiography *How I Grew* will be published in February, 1987, by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. She holds the Charles Stevenson Chair of Literature at Bard College.
**James Laughlin** was a student of Ezra Pound's "Ezuversity" in Rapallo in 1935, a longtime friend of Pound's and publisher of his work. For more biographical information, refer to the poetry contributors' notes.

## INTERVIEWS

**Jonathan Dee** is an associate editor of *The Paris Review*. His work has appeared in the *Village Voice*, and he is a recipient of a Henfield Foundation award for fiction.
**Ron Hansen** was a student of John Irving's at the University of Iowa from 1972 to 1974. He is the author of *Desperadoes* (Knopf), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Knopf), and a forthcoming children's book, *The Shadowmaker* (Harper & Row). He is currently teaching in the writing program at the University of Arizona.

## ART

**Jonathan Borofsky** was born in Boston in 1942 and lives in Venice, California. A major traveling exhibition of his work was recently shown at the Philadel-

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phia Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Llyn Foulkes** was born in Yakima, Washington, in 1934, and currently lives in Topanga, California. Recent exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, and Asher/Faure Gallery, Los Angeles.

**Alice Neel** was born in Merion Square, Pennsylvania, in 1900, and died in New York in 1984. Major one-woman exhibitions of her work have been held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, and Robert Miller Gallery, New York.

**Frank Stella** was born in Malden, Massachusetts, in 1936 and lives in New York. His work has been exhibited internationally, including shows at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas, Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, and M. Knoedler and Co., New York.

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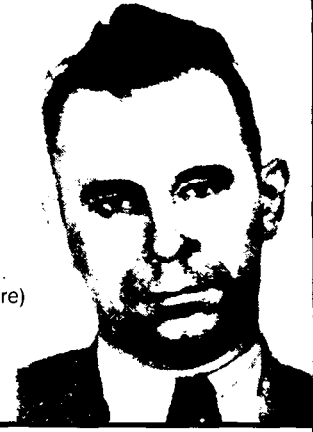

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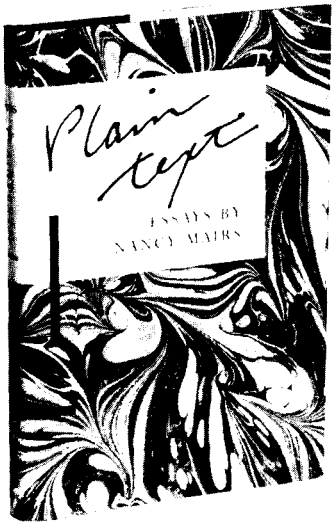


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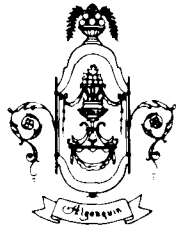


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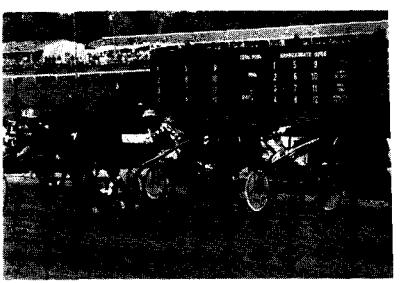

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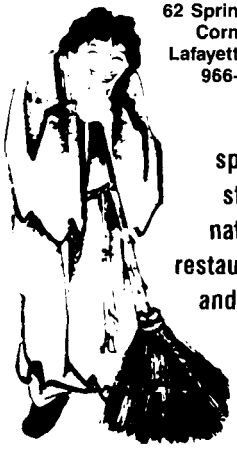

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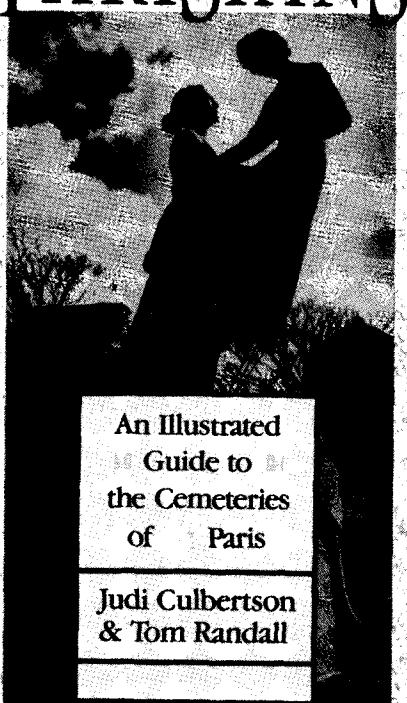

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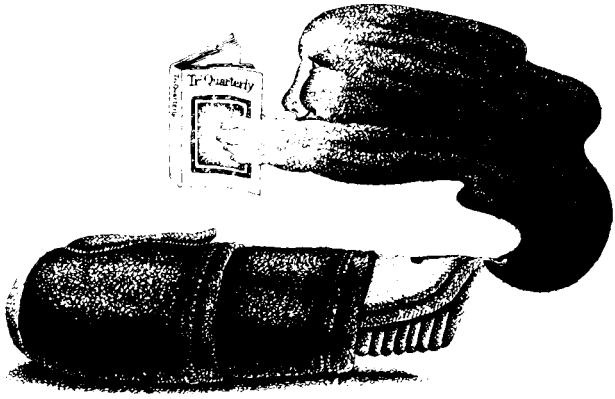


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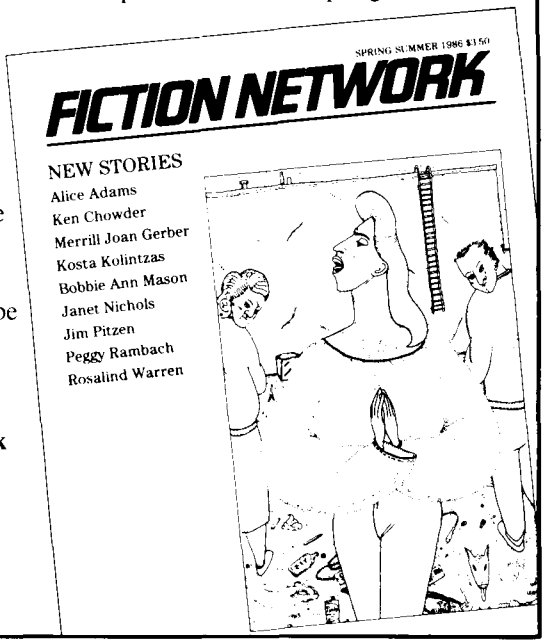



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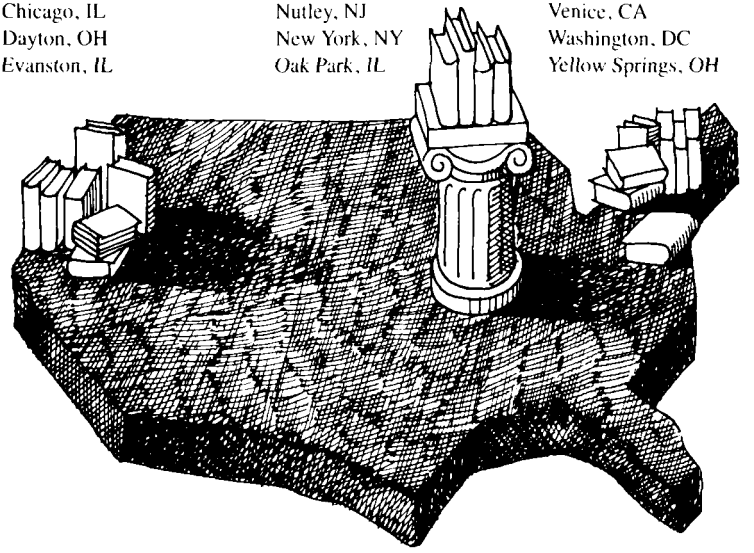

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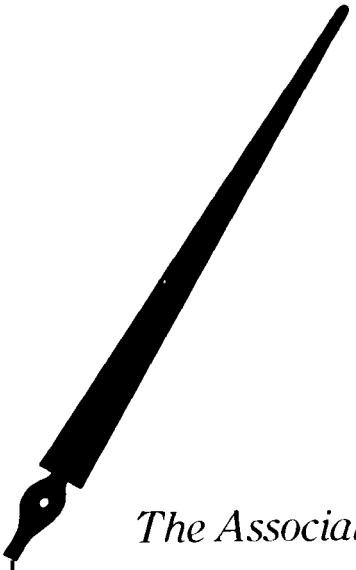

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